

# COVID-19: Guidance for People at Higher Risk

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There is an expanding global outbreak of respiratory illness called COVID-19 caused by a novel (new) coronavirus and we know that you might be worried. We at the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) have been working hard for months to ensure we are as prepared as a city as we can be. While most cases of COVID-19 cause a mild illness, the virus is spreading easily from person to person and this puts entire communities at risk.

While many persons in our community may get sick, the vast majority will recover. Most cases of COVID-19 result in mild illness but people who are older and who have other health conditions are more likely to have serious illness. Everyone has a role to play in getting ready and staying healthy.

**If you are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 because of your age or because you have a serious long-term health problem, it is extra important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of getting sick with the disease.**

## Who is at higher risk?

Those at higher risk include:

- People over 60 years of age. The risk increases significantly thereafter and escalates with age, with persons over age 80 in the highest risk category.
- People, regardless of age, with underlying health conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, or chronic lung diseases like COPD, as well as those with severely weakened immune systems.

## Get Ready for COVID-19 Now

### Practice social distancing and avoid travel

- Stay home as much as possible. Consider ways of getting food and supplies brought to your house through family, social, or commercial networks.
- Stay away from crowded social gatherings of people as much as possible such as parades, conferences, sporting events, and concerts where large numbers of people are within arm's length of one another.
  - Your risk of exposure to respiratory viruses like COVID-19 may increase in crowded, closed-in settings with little air circulation if there are people in the crowd who are sick.
- Avoid all non-essential travel including plane trips, and especially avoid embarking on cruise ships.

### Have supplies on hand

- Contact your healthcare provider to ask about obtaining extra necessary medications to have on hand in case you need to stay home for a prolonged period of time.
- If you cannot get extra medications, consider using mail-order for medications.
- Be sure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms. Most people will be able to recover from COVID-19 at home.
- Have enough household items and groceries on hand so that you will be prepared to stay at home.

## Take everyday preventative actions

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, or having been in a public place. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. When hands are visibly dirty, always wash with soap and water.
- To the extent possible, avoid touching high-touch surfaces in public places – elevator buttons, door handles, handrails, handshaking with people, etc. Use a tissue or your sleeve to cover your hand or finger if you must touch something. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer after touching surfaces in public places.
- Avoid touching your face, nose, eyes, etc.
- Clean and disinfect your home to remove germs: practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces (for example: tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks & cell phones).
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

## Have a plan for if you get sick

- Consult with your health care provider for more information about monitoring your health for symptoms suggestive of COVID-19.
- Stay in touch with others by phone or email. You may need to ask for help from friends, family, neighbors, community health workers, etc. if you become sick.
- Determine who can provide you with care if your caregiver gets sick.

## Watch for symptoms and emergency warning signs

- Pay attention for potential COVID-19 symptoms including, fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. **If you feel like you are developing symptoms, call your doctor.**
- If you develop emergency warning signs for COVID-19 get medical attention immediately. In adults, emergency warning signs include:
  - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
  - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
  - New confusion or inability to arouse
  - Bluish lips or face.

*This list is not all inclusive. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning*

## What to Do if You Get Sick

- Stay home, call your doctor and let them know about your symptoms.
- Tell them that you have or may have been exposed to COVID-19 and you are at higher risk of serious illness. This will help them take care of you and keep other people from getting infected or exposed.
- Know when to get emergency help; if you have any of the emergency warning signs listed above, call 911.

## What Others can do to Support Older Adults and Other High Risk Individuals

### Community Support for Older Adults and Other High Risk Individuals

- Community preparedness planning for COVID-19 should include older adults and people with disabilities, and the organizations that support them in their communities, to ensure their needs are taken into consideration.
  - Many of these individuals live in the community, and many depend on services and supports provided in their homes or in the community to maintain their health and independence.

*This version was released on 03/10/2020. It may be updated with new guidance.  
Please visit [www.chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://www.chicago.gov/coronavirus) to find the latest version.*

- Long-term care facilities should be vigilant to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19. [Information for long-term care facilities can be found here.](#)

### Family and Caregiver Support

- Know what medications your loved one is taking and see if you can help them have extra on hand.
- Monitor food and other medical supplies (oxygen, incontinence, dialysis, wound care) needed and create a back-up plan.
- Stock up on non-perishable food items to have on hand in your home to minimize trips to stores.
- If you care for a loved one living in a care facility, monitor the situation, ask about the health of the other residents frequently and know the protocol if there is an outbreak.

For more information, see CDC's [Guidance for People at Risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19](#).

For more information on Chicago's COVID-19 response, visit [www.chicago.gov/coronavirus](http://www.chicago.gov/coronavirus), email [coronavirus@chicago.gov](mailto:coronavirus@chicago.gov), or call **312-746-4835**.