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## Office for the Aging

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**To:** Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) Directors and the Aging Services Network  
**From:** New York State Office for the Aging  
**Subject:** Providing Materials to Assist AAA Directors and Aging Services Network to Help Contain the Spread of COVID-19

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As Governor Cuomo indicated in recent briefings on the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), New York State is doing everything possible to confront and contain this virus. Under Governor Cuomo's direction, NYSOFA is actively working with other state agencies in efforts to respond. The identification of new cases in our state is exactly what the State anticipated and prepared for. All cases are being tracked by public health investigators to limit the potential for viral transmission.

New York State is continually working to educate New Yorkers about how COVID-19 spreads and who is most at-risk, and to dispel misinformation. NYSOFA offers materials in this document to assist Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) directors and the aging services network regarding important practices for helping contain the spread of COVID-19.

NYS' Novel Coronavirus Website: [coronavirus.health.ny.gov](https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov) is a webpage maintained by the New York State Department of Health (DOH) and contains the latest updates on COVID-19 to assist you and resources such as informational videos available in Cantonese, Mandarin, and Korean, as well as English. Also, the NYS Novel Coronavirus Hotline is available at **1-888-364-3065**. New Yorkers with questions about the virus can speak with public health experts in their preferred language.

The network of aging professionals in New York State plays a significant role in our ability to identify, prevent, and respond to COVID-19. The network serves hundreds of thousands of older adults and their families every day. Many of the programs and services that we deliver are in group settings, making the possibility of infection and disease transmission more prominent—and due to the impact on older adults with chronic conditions—making the impact to this population more serious. Programs, participants, staff, and volunteers working in congregate/senior centers, social adult day services, transportation, case management, home delivered meals, and other group activities (i.e., health and wellness programs, CDSME, etc.) should exercise extreme caution.

Health experts are still learning about COVID-19, but we know symptoms range from mild (like a common cold) to severe symptoms that require hospitalization. Experts have learned that older adults, people who have chronic medical conditions (e.g. heart disease, diabetes and lung disease), and people who are immunosuppressed are at higher risk for serious illness and death from COVID-19.

If a COVID-19 outbreak happens in your community, it could last for a long time (an outbreak is when a large number of people suddenly get sick). If you are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 because of your age or because you have a chronic health problem, it is critical for you to take actions to reduce your risk of getting sick with the disease. These actions can slow the spread and reduce the impact of disease.

This guidance is designed to do the following:

- Stop the spread of COVID-19 from staff to older adults and their family members;
- Stop the spread of COVID-19 from older adults and their families to staff;
- Know the signs and symptoms of the virus in order to take immediate action; and
- Implement appropriate prevention measures as per health official guidelines.

## How does COVID-19 Spread?

### Person-to-person spread

The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

### Can someone spread the virus without being sick?

- People are thought to be more contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).
- However, spread may be possible when an individual is asymptomatic.

### Spread from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects

A person may get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes.

### How easily does the virus spread?

How easily a virus spreads from person-to-person can vary. Some viruses are highly contagious (spread easily), like measles, while other viruses do not spread as easily. Another factor is whether the spread is sustained, spreading continually without stopping.

The virus that causes COVID-19 seems to be spreading easily and sustainably in the community (“community spread”) in some affected [geographic areas](#).

### Watch for symptoms

Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases.

The following symptoms may appear **2-14 days after exposure**:

- Fever;
- Cough; or
- Shortness of breath.

### Prevention

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
  - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask.
  - **CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.**

## Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick

### Follow the steps below:

If you are sick with COVID-19 or suspect you are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, follow the steps below to help prevent the disease from spreading to people in your home and community. For further information, visit DOH's COVID-19 webpage [Protect Yourself and Your Family from Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

### Stay home except to get medical care

- **Stay home:** People who are ill with COVID-19 must isolate at home during their illness. You must eliminate activities outside your home, except for getting medical care.
- **Remain isolated.**

### Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home

- **Stay away from others:** You must stay away from other people in your home. Also, you should use a separate bathroom, if available.
- **Limit contact with pets & animals:** You should restrict contact with pets and other animals while you are sick with COVID-19, just like you would around other people. Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus.
  - When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick. If you are sick with COVID-19, avoid contact with your pet, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with pets and wear a facemask. See [COVID-19 and Animals](#) for more information.

### For Communities and Senior Centers:

There are many ways to assist older adults (who are strongly encouraged to stay home during community transmission of COVID-19) to access resources:

- **Food & other supplies:** Individuals may need help accessing food/supplies if they are not able to shop for themselves. Home delivered meals, food banks or store deliveries may need to be arranged to provide sufficient nutrition. Involve available family members or neighbors, if necessary.
- **Medications and other medical necessities:** Work with medical providers or social service agencies familiar with the individual to ensure that medications can be delivered to the home. If oxygen is needed, reach out to suppliers to arrange for refills or deliveries. Telehealth services should be available through their insurance carrier. Consider a home assessment with the older adult to identify needs.
- **Social Connections:** Social isolation may be experienced by homebound older adults who depend on the center to interact with friends and your staff. Consider working with social service agencies to provide telecommunication options including Facetime and interactive games.

- **General Welfare Checks:** Consider contacting service providers such as postal delivery workers, community paramedics or neighborhood watch groups to check on the welfare of homebound older adults.

### **For Older Adults:**

- Re-start an activity or hobby that you enjoy.
- Reach out to family and friends you haven't spoken to in a while.
- Communicate with your faith-based organization for additional support.
- Find ways to replace your social interactions and habits; for example, if you regularly attend religious services find religious radio or television station or podcasts that you can listen to or watch.

### **For Caregivers:**

- Know what medications your loved one takes 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 nonperishable food items to have on hand in your home to minimize trips to stores.
- Make sure your loved one is connected to technology so they can reach out to family, friends, or use the Internet to stay connected.
- Stock up on books, puzzles or other activities that your loved one enjoys so they can stay busy.
- Call your loved one more often and encourage them to reach out to other family and friends.
- Look for signs that your loved one may be feeling lonely:
  - Verbalizing feeling down or lonely or speaking in an apathetic voice.
  - Reassure your loved one that it is temporary.
- 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.