

## **CARING DURING COVID-19: How Family Caregivers Can Prepare for a Pandemic**

The declaration of a global pandemic in recent weeks has caused considerable panic among the aging community. However, family caregivers are perhaps the most worried, knowing that they could end up being a carrier that passes Covid-19 to their more vulnerable counterpart; they may even be at a high risk themselves, scared of what might happen if they were to contract the disease.

In this instance, the CDC has recommended specific plans of action for those who are acting as caregivers, in order to plan for the worst-case scenario:

1. Create a household plan of action
  - a. Talk with the people who need to be included in your plan, such as household members, other relatives, or friends.
  - b. Plan ways to care for those who might be at greater risk for serious complications. Though research about the disease is in its infant stages, data for related coronaviruses suggests that older adults and persons who have underlying chronic medical conditions may be at risk for more serious complications. If anyone in your household are at increased risk, monitor your health for symptoms.
  - c. Get to know your neighbors. Talk with your community about emergency planning. Consider joining neighborhood chats or social media groups in order to stay informed.
  - d. Identify aid organizations in your community. Create a list that your household is able to access in a moment of crisis. Consider including organizations that provide mental health or counseling services, food, and other supplies.
  - e. Create an emergency contact list. Be sure your entire household has a list of contacts for family, friends, neighbors, carpool drivers, healthcare providers, teachers, employers, the local public health department, and other community resources.
2. Practice good personal health habits and plan for home-based actions.
  - a. Everyday preventive actions you can begin enacting now:
    - i. Avoid close contact with those who are sick. Stay home and away from others not in your immediate household as often as possible; this is called “social distancing.” (Arizona has yet to declare a quarantine, which would make this a stipulation rather than a personal choice).
    - ii. Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.
    - iii. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
    - iv. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects using regular household detergency and water. These can include tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet handles.

- v. 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. If you do not have access to soap and water, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
    - b. Choose a room in your home that can be used to separate sick household members if needed, including a separate bathroom. If someone becomes sick, clean these spaces as often as possible.
3. Be prepared if your child's school or childcare facility is temporarily dismissed.
  - a. Learn about the emergency operations plan at your child's school or childcare facility. Understand the plan for continuing education and social services, such as student meal programs. Work with administrators and teachers if all instruction becomes remote.
4. Plan for potential changes at your workplace.
  - a. Learn about your employer's emergency operations plan. Discuss sick-leave policies and telework options for workers who are sick or who need to stay home to care for sick household members.
  - b. If your employer's plan in this instance is to let non-essential employees go, create a plan for how you will cope with the lost income. Watch the news to stay informed regarding the Coronavirus Bill in Senate and if you qualify for a bailout.

Creating a household plan can help protect a caregiver's health and the health of those they care for. Stay calm and stay informed. If people work together to slow the spread of the virus, we will be able to get through this emergency together.

For more information, and to read these recommendations on the CDC website, go to:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/get-your-household-ready-for-COVID-19.html>

For questions on Area Agency on Aging (AAA) please call us toll free: 1-877-521-3500