

Guidance for Family Caregivers to Address Concerns Related to the COVID-19 Crisis

Family caregivers face special challenges during this time of self-isolation. The person in your care needs you to be physically healthy and emotionally strong, which can feel overwhelming during a crisis. Below are guidelines to help caregivers through the days ahead. Staying connected to friends and having access to information from qualified professionals in your community is the best way to maintain peace of mind.

1. **Create a Household Plan That Practices Prevention.** Ensure that you and everyone in your household follows [CDC Guidelines to protect yourself and your loved ones](#):
 - a. 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 a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
 - a. Avoiding close contact with others as much as possible (about 6 feet).
 - b. Stay home when you are sick, except to get needed medical care.
 - c. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
 - d. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet, refrigerator and appliance handles).
 - e. For disinfection, a list of products with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is available at [Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Fighting Productspdf iconexternal icon](#). Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products.
2. **Know who is at greatest risk.** According to the CDC, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19. If you or your household members are at increased risk for COVID-19 complications, please consult with your health care provider for more information about monitoring their health and symptoms.
3. **Watch for symptoms.** If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and symptoms, such as cough or difficulty breathing, call your healthcare provider for medical advice.
4. **Choose a room in your home that can be used to separate sick household members from those who are healthy.** Identify a separate bathroom for the sick person to use, if possible. Plan to clean these rooms, as needed. [Learn how to care for someone with COVID-19 at home.](#)

5. **Create an emergency plan.** Talk with family and friends about what you and the care recipient are likely to need during self-isolation and ask people to volunteer to ensure these needs are met. Make sure there is an emergency contact list and instructions about medications and specific care needs in case one of you gets sick. Contact your local Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) if you need help creating a plan. [Find your local ADRC here.](#)

6. **Create a list of contacts and community resources.** Ensure your household has a current list of contacts for family, friends, neighbors, carpool drivers, health care providers, teachers, employers, the [local public health department](#) and Aging & Disability Resource Center. Include help lines such as:
 - a. **Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline** – 800-272-3900 or [live chat](#).
 - b. **Caregiver Action Network Caregiver Help Desk** – toll free number 855-227-3640 or [live chat](#)
 - c. **Institute on Aging Friendship Line** - crisis intervention hotline and a warmline for non-emergency emotional support calls – 800-971-0016
 - d. **Disaster Distress Helpline** – free, 24/7 crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related natural or human-caused disasters (options for deaf/hard of hearing and Spanish speakers) 1-800-985-5990 or Text TalkWithUs to 66746

7. **Be aware of changes** in daily operations of ADRCs and other community support agencies in accordance with State orders and CDC recommendations. Please call to find out details as the following guidelines are being enforced at varying degrees across the state.
 - Suspension of classes and support groups – some are being transitioned to being held by phone or online
 - Suspension of in-home and in-office visits and offering visits by phone instead
 - Closure of congregate dining sites with options for picking up or delivery of a meal

8. **Take advantage of virtual supports** such as telephone support groups, webinars, tele-events and message boards, from the following organizations.
 - [Alzheimer's Association](#) offers a variety of online and virtual supports. In addition to a telephone support group for Wisconsin caregivers on Tuesdays from 5:30-7:00 pm and Thursdays from 1-2:30 pm. Register by calling 800-272-3900 and ask for **Wisconsin** Support Group information
 - [ALZConnected](#) is a free, online community for anyone affected by Alzheimer's or other dementia such as message boards and a Caregivers Forum.
 - [Caregiver Teleconnection](#) holds weekly live call-in events as well as archived programs all relating to caring for someone who is older or disabled.
 - [Alzheimer's Foundation of America](#) hosts webinars that are accessible online.
 - [Family Caregiver Alliance](#) has online caregiver support groups

9. **If you have loved ones living in nursing homes or assisted living residences** be sure to call in advance to find out their most recent policies about visiting. The State Department of Health Services has issued [guidance restricting visits](#) to all residential care facilities. Stay in touch by phone, email and mail until restrictions are lifted.

10. **If you are caring for a grandchild or other young child**, check out these resources:
 - a. [Children and Coronavirus](#) – information from the CDC
 - b. [Tips for Families - Coronavirus](#)
 - c. [COVID-19 Fact Sheet for Grandfamilies and Multigenerational Families](#)
 - d. If your child receives free or reduced school meals, contact the school to find out how these meals can be accessed during school closures.

11. **Discuss your needs with your employer.** Learn if telework is an option or if leave options are available. Emphasize that someone else’s health is dependent on you remaining well, too.

12. **Take care of your emotional health needs.** Make time to unwind. Call a friend or spiritual support, listen to music that makes you feel good or other relaxing activities. Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories about COVID-19. Connect with family and friends by phone or **consider connecting via conference call or video conferencing.** [FreeConferenceCall.com](#), [FreeConference.com](#) and [Zoom](#) are a few platforms that allow multiple people to talk or video-chat.

13. **Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation.** Get up-to-date information about local COVID-19 activity from the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services website](#).