

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Guidance for Individuals with Disabilities and Chronic Conditions and Caregivers

Recent Updates

10/26/20: List of symptoms updated, length of time to self-isolate if infected with COVID-19 changed, information on coping with stress added.

This guidance is for people with disabilities or serious chronic health conditions and their household members and caregivers. It provides information that will help you avoid becoming infected and help all of us slow the spread of COVID-19 infection in Los Angeles County.

People infected with COVID-19 can have a wide range of symptoms – there are people who have no symptoms, people who have symptoms that feel like a cold or the flu, and people who are severely ill and must go to the hospital. At its most extreme, infection with COVID-19 can result in death. While the degree of symptoms varies from individual to individual, people with chronic conditions, including heart, lung and kidney disease and diabetes, as well as decreased immune function, are at higher risk of getting seriously ill if they become infected. People with disabilities that affect lung function may be at elevated risk as well.

INDIVIDUAL & CAREGIVER PROTECTION AT HOME

Here are steps you can take to prevent infection or, if you do have signs of illness, manage your care at home. As a caregiver, you can work with your client or household member to act on these steps.

1. First and foremost, stay at home! The best way to keep from getting infected is to reduce contact with people who may carry the virus and with places where infected people may be present.
 - If there is no way to avoid going out, make sure to keep six feet between yourself and other people. Stay far from anyone who shows signs of being ill, like coughing or sneezing. The virus is thought to spread mainly for person-to-person during close personal contact and through respiratory drops when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
 - Carry hand sanitizer and use that frequently while you are out. It may be possible to get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object which has the virus on it and then touching your own mouth, nose, or eyes. If you touch any surfaces while you are out, try to find a place to wash your hands with soap and water for a full twenty seconds. If you can't do that, use hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your face while you are out. At any time, you should only touch your face after washing your hands.
2. Second, be sure you have everything you need to meet ongoing health needs. These are things you need all the time, but it is especially important to make sure they are in place now.
 - Make sure you have a Personal Emergency Plan. You can find a form that is designed for people with chronic conditions or disabilities from the California Health and Human Services Agency at [Personal Emergency Plan for People with Access and Functional Needs](#). The plan will help you get the care you need if your regular caregiver gets sick or has to be at home to care for family members. It will also help if you become sick with the virus or face any other emergency. Make sure to keep it updated with current information about:

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- How to reach all of your health care providers, including specialists and therapists, and any 24/7 links provided by your health care provider or health plan when you need care in an emergency;
 - Contact information for a pharmacy you use;
 - Other services you rely on, such as meals programs, care coordinators or telehealth services.
- Make arrangements to get the care you need from any critical out-of-home medical services, such as dialysis, infusion, blood treatment or chemotherapy centers. If you need to go out to receive these services, make sure you have a transportation plan that allows you to get there without extra risk of exposure. If you will be using public transportation, avoid going at busy times. You can get updates about Los Angeles buses and trains during the COVID-19 outbreak at <https://www.metro.net/>. A good resource for transportation assistance is the County's Access program (https://accessla.org/riding_access/overview.html#).
 - Keep durable medical equipment in good repair. Make sure all equipment is in working order and used as instructed in product guidance. Know where to call if you have equipment problems. Also, make sure you have adequate non-durable medical supplies.
3. While you are home, limit close contact with people other than your caregiver(s) as much as you can. If possible, even household members should stay a safe 6 feet away and you should avoid sharing items such as cell phones, TV remotes, utensils or other kitchen or household items. Also avoid touching light switches, doorknobs, appliance doors, and other household surfaces that have been touched by other people. Wash your hands or use sanitizer after any contact with a shared surface.
4. If you have one or more caregivers to help around the house or with personal care, they must be very careful not to bring the virus into your house. That means they must be careful about their own health. If they have any symptoms of illness and if you have an alternate caregiver, they should stay home.

Even if they don't show any signs of illness, caregiver(s) should wear disposable gloves and a face mask at any time when their job requires close contact with you. You should both be careful to wipe down surfaces that you both touch. Use household cleaners and EPA-registered disinfectants that are appropriate for the surface, following label instructions. Labels contain instructions for use of the cleaning product including how to be careful when using the product, such as wearing gloves and making sure there is good airflow during use. The department of public health has posted guidelines for [cleaning in the home](#) which you can use.

5. Arrange for food to be delivered to your home so neither you nor your caregiver(s) have to shop. Several grocery chains have delivery services and many restaurants that do not usually deliver are now doing so. If you are over 60 or have limited mobility, you may also be eligible for home-delivered meals from Meals on Wheels (see [Meals on Wheels](#)) or the Los Angeles County Area Agency on Aging (see [LA County Aging Services](#)).

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Guidance for Individuals with Disabilities and Chronic Conditions and Caregivers

Make sure that anyone bringing a delivery to your home leaves the items outside your door to avoid having direct, face-to-face contact. This is easy to do if you can arrange payment online for whatever is being delivered.

If you need help carrying food or other delivered items, ask the delivery person to give you time to step away while they carry the item in and keep a six-foot distance from them while they are in your home. Be sure to clean any surface they may have touched in your home after their visit is over. And keep the visit short.

IF YOU DEVELOP SYMPTOMS THAT MAY BE DUE TO COVID-19

6. Symptoms of COVID-19 may include one or more of the following: fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, sore throat, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, congestion or runny nose, or new loss of taste or smell. This list of symptoms is not complete.
7. If you develop symptoms that might be due to COVID-19, you should stay at home, and call your health care provider about the need for testing and isolation. If you have mild symptoms, you should be able to stay at home and recover at home. Do not go to the doctor's office without calling first. For more information, visit ph.lacounty.gov/covidcare.
8. If you have COVID-19, note that guidelines for home care may need to be modified to meet your needs. Standard guidelines are:
 - Rest, drink fluids, manage symptoms with appropriate over-the-counter medications. Talk to your doctor about any other steps that are important so you can manage COVID-19 symptoms while dealing with your ongoing health needs.
 - In general, individuals who are infected with COVID-19 are required to self-isolate (keep apart from other people) at home for at least 10 days **and** for 1 day (24 hours) after there is no fever (without any fever-reducing medication) **and** symptoms (e.g. cough and shortness of breath) have improved. For more information, visit ph.lacounty.gov/covidisolation.
9. If your symptoms worsen while you are home, for example, if your shortness of breath is getting worse, or you experience chest tightness or feel confused, contact your doctor right away. It may be appropriate for you to be cared for in a hospital. If that is necessary, your physician or a family member or caregiver can call 911 to arrange for ambulance transport.

If you are having difficulty breathing, feel pain or pressure in your chest, have bluish lips or face or are experiencing a new onset of confusion or difficulty waking up, call 911 or go to an emergency room immediately.

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AND CHRONIC CONDITIONS AND THEIR CAREGIVERS IN STAFFED FACILITIES

The principles discussed above also apply to staffed facilities. Care should be designed to minimize your risk through social distancing and careful infection control. DPH has detailed instructions for people who

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Guidance for Individuals with Disabilities and Chronic Conditions and Caregivers

manage all kinds of group living programs (see [DPH Congregate Facility Guidance](#) and [Skilled Nursing Facility Guidance](#)), but you should be aware of the guidelines so you can make sure they are followed.

KNOW WHERE TO GET RELIABLE INFORMATION

It is very important to know where to get true information about how to prevent COVID-19 infection and take care of yourself if you get sick. For complete guidelines about the safe management of congregate living sites and other guidelines and fact sheets, visit the Department of Public Health coronavirus website: [DPH Coronavirus Information Page](#).

DEALING WITH STRESS

If worries about sickness or the isolation required to prevent getting sick are getting you down, help is available from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH). The DMH's [COVID-19 webpage](#) and the 211LA webpage provide local resources to address mental health & wellbeing needs and concerns. Guidance and resources are also available on the CDC webpage, [Coping with Stress](#).

If you want to speak with someone about your mental health, contact your doctor or the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Access Center 24/7 Helpline at 1-800-854-7771.

If you have questions and would like to speak to someone, call the Los Angeles County Information line 2-1-1, which is available 24 hours a day.

