

## Guidance for Older New Yorkers: What you need to know about COVID-19

**There is widespread community transmission of COVID-19. This means COVID-19 is circulating in the community and all New Yorkers should act as though they are exposed.** The symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, shortness of breath, and sore throat. People 50 years of age or older and people who have other chronic health conditions including lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, kidney disease, liver disease, cancer, or a weakened immune system, are most at risk for severe COVID-19 illness.

Together, we can slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect those at higher risk of severe illness and our health care workers from getting sick. See below for what to do, and what not to do, to help older New Yorkers stay safe.

For the latest information and guidance on COVID-19, visit the NYC Health Department's website at [www.nyc.gov/health/coronavirus](http://www.nyc.gov/health/coronavirus). For real-time updates, text "COVID" to 692-692. Message and data rates may apply.

### *The DOs and DON'Ts of protecting against COVID-19*

#### ✓ **DO take steps to protect yourself from COVID-19**

- Stay home. All New Yorkers — healthy or sick — need to stay home. **This is especially important for people 50 years old or older and people with any of the chronic health conditions listed above.** You should only leave your home for essential tasks, such as work (if you are an [essential worker](#)), getting groceries and supplies, or essential medical care.
- As of April 17, people in New York must wear face coverings in public places, particularly where they cannot keep six feet away from others, in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order 202.17. A face covering is any well-secured paper or cloth (like a bandana or scarf) that covers your nose and mouth. It is essential that everyone continue to practice physical distancing and healthy hand hygiene even when wearing a face covering — including keeping 6 feet of distance between yourself and others whenever possible. For more information, visit [www.nyc.gov/health/coronavirus](http://www.nyc.gov/health/coronavirus) and look for "[FAQ About Face Coverings](#)."
- Closely monitor your health for fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat or other cold or flu-like symptoms that are not related to a pre-existing condition.
- Wash your hands with soap and water often, for at least 20 seconds. If you are unable to wash your hands, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when sneezing or coughing. Do not use your hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead, wave.
- Maintain at least **6 feet of distance** between yourself and others.
- Avoid all nonessential travel and interactions.
- If you need to leave home, avoid public transportation – walk or take a private vehicle when possible.

✓ **DO consult with a doctor if you are experiencing symptoms and you are 50 years of age or older or have any of the chronic health conditions listed above.**

- Use telephone, text, telemedicine, or a patient portal to reach out rather than going to your health care provider in person.
- You and your provider will decide if you need to come to medical care. You do not need to be tested for COVID-19 unless you are admitted to the hospital with a severe illness like pneumonia.
- If you need help finding a health care provider, **call 311** to find a NYC Health and Hospitals provider. NYC Health + Hospitals provides care to all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, insurance status or ability to pay. New Yorkers who are at high-risk for severe COVID-19 illness because of age or a chronic health condition can call NYC Health + Hospitals at 1-844-NYC-4NYC (1-844-692-4692) for more information.
- **If you have any of the following symptoms, go to an emergency room or call 911:**
  - Trouble breathing
  - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
  - New confusion or inability to stay awake
  - Blue lips or face

*This is not a complete list. If you are concerned you may be experiencing a medical emergency, contact your provider immediately or **call 911**.*

✓ **DO keep your body and mind healthy.**

- If you are not sick, go outside and get exercise, but remember to wear a face covering and to practice healthy hand hygiene and physical distancing by staying at least 6 feet from other people. Walking, running, and bicycling are good examples of activities that do not require close contact with others or shared equipment.
- Try to stay connected with friends and family through telephone, social media, and video chat. It's helpful to see your loved ones and interact with them remotely.

✗ **DO NOT go to a hospital unless you are told to by your doctor or you are having a medical emergency.**

- Going to a hospital can expose you and others to infection. It also increases exposure risks to health care workers and could take away care from someone who is critically ill.

### **Senior Center Delivered Meals**

In response to social distancing and recommendations for older adults to remain in their homes, all DFTA-funded senior centers are currently closed for congregate programming. Congregate meals are now being delivered to the homes of senior center members through a centralized delivery system. Grab-and-go meals are no longer permitted.

Starting the week of March 30th, all senior centers fully transitioned from providing grab-and-go meals to relying on the centralized delivery system.

- **When did senior centers stop providing grab-and-go congregate meals?**  
Starting the week of March 23th, all DFTA-funded senior centers gradually transitioned from providing congregate meals via 'grab-and-go' meals to a centralized direct delivery meal system for older adults. To ensure that there was no disruption to older adults' access to food, senior centers continued grab-and-go meal service until the new centralized direct delivery system was fully rolled-out on March

30th. Starting March 30th, grab-and-go meals are not permitted by DFTA, as it is no longer consistent with the NYC Health Department's recommendation that older adults stay home.

- **How are senior centers receiving meals for delivery?**

DFTA's goal is to ensure that older adults continue to receive their daily meal despite citywide congregate sites closure. Ongoing coordination between DFTA, contractors, and senior centers will continue to ensure a streamlined and efficient process is maintained. In addition, robocall notifications are currently being deployed to ensure that all older adults are alerted to the delivery of their meal package in advance of its arrival. DFTA is also working with its partners at [GetFoodNYC](#) to expand this meal delivery service and transition to the larger food security plan led by the City.

- **How many meals will each older adult receive?**

Through DFTA's centralized direct delivery system, 5-meal packages are delivered to each older adult every week. In the near future, delivery meals will transition to more meals per day under the City's GetFoodNYC initiative.

- **Will kosher meals be available?**

DFTA-contracted providers are currently delivering kosher meals for older adults throughout the five boroughs. Those who are currently receiving DFTA kosher meals will continue to receive kosher meals after the transition to GetFoodNYC initiative is complete. New enrollees to GetFoodNYC can specify when they are enrolling that they prefer kosher meals.

- **How can non-DFTA senior center members sign up to receive meals?**

Older adults who are not enrolled for meal delivery through their senior center can register to receive food through the City's [GetFoodNYC](#) initiative by calling 311 or visiting [nyc.gov/getfood](#). The [GetFoodNYC](#) initiative provides food for vulnerable and food-insecure New Yorkers not currently served through existing food delivery programs.

### ***The DOs and DON'Ts of preventing falls while staying at home***

Each year, one in three older New Yorkers falls, and most of these falls happen at home. During the COVID-19 response, it's important to do everything we can to prevent falls and injuries in the home.

#### **✓ DO take steps to improve the safety of your home**

- You can: remove objects from the floor; fix loose or torn carpet; secure throw rugs to the ground with rug tape; and coil electrical wires next to the wall and secure them.
- Use a step stool with a handrail to access hard-to-reach items. It is unsafe to stand on furniture.
- Lighting is important. Replace burned out light bulbs as soon as possible; place night lights along dark corridors; and reduce glare by adding curtains or shades to windows. Place a lamp within reach of the bed, so that if needed you can turn it on at night while reclining and let your eyes adjust.
- Hardware stores are essential businesses and remain open. If small repairs are urgently needed in your home, talk to your super and building management or call your local hardware store and ask about contactless delivery options.
- Refer to the [NYC Home Safety Checklist](#) for additional ideas for protecting your home from falls hazards.

✓ **DO keep your feet pain-free and healthy**

- Wear comfortable shoes that fit well, even at home.
- Keep feet clean and dry (especially between toes), trim toenails regularly, and seek call your doctor for any foot problems or difficulty cutting nails.

✓ **DO continue taking and managing your medications**

- It is important to continue taking all your prescriptions and over-the-counter medications. Pharmacies remain open and many are offering free delivery. Call your pharmacist to discuss refills and possible delivery options. Call 311 if you need help connecting with a pharmacist.

✗ **DO NOT wear inappropriate footwear around the house**

- Avoid typical house slippers with flimsy soles and backless shoes like flip flops. Try to avoid walking around the home in socks or stockings, as they can be slippery, and limit time walking barefoot. If you must wear socks or stockings, try to find versions with grips on the bottom.

### **Additional questions**

**Is it still safe to use Access-A-Ride to get to medical appointments or pick up medicine?**

- Access-A-Ride is now abiding by the prohibition on shared rides. When traveling, try to avoid contact with others as much as possible, use a face covering, avoid touching your face, and wash your hands often or use hand sanitizer. Where possible, consult your doctor over the phone and limit in-person appointments as much as possible, have your doctor provide prescriptions for a several month supply, and have medicines delivered to you at home.

**Who should I call if I feel isolated?**

- Remain in touch with friends and family through telephone and video-chat.
- If you are normally a user of a Senior Center, you should reach out to them to see what services they are providing or call Aging Connect at 212-Aging-NYC (212-244-6469) or call 311.
- If you feel isolated or have symptoms of stress that are overwhelming, you can connect with trained counselors at NYC Well, a free and confidential mental health support service that can help New Yorkers cope. NYC Well staff are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can provide brief counseling and referrals to care in over 200 languages. For support, call [1-888-NYC-WELL \(1-888-692-9355\)](tel:1-888-NYC-WELL), text “WELL” to 65173 or visit [www.nyc.gov/nycwell](http://www.nyc.gov/nycwell) to [chat online](#).
- Older New Yorkers experiencing domestic and gender-based violence need to know that supportive services are still available and easy to access. Elder abuse can be financial, physical, emotional, and include neglect. Call 311 for more information on DFTA’s elder abuse program. For domestic and gender-based violence survivors, please visit [www.nyc.gov/nychope](http://www.nyc.gov/nychope) or call NYC’s 24-hour hotline 1-800-621-4673. For any emergencies, please call 911.