

Frequently Asked Questions About COVID-19 and Older New Yorkers Who Live at Home

COVID-19 continues to spread in our communities but there are steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones. Stay informed and use the information and resources below to stay healthy and safe. If you are 65 or older or have an underlying health condition, you are at increased risk for severe COVID-19 illness and should stay home as much as possible.

COVID-19 Basics

How is COVID-19 spread?

- The virus is most likely to spread to people who are in close contact (within about 6 feet) with a person who has COVID-19. It is spread through droplets that are sprayed when a person coughs or sneezes, sings or talks.
- People who have COVID-19 but have no symptoms can still spread the virus.
- It may be possible for people to get COVID-19 by touching a surface that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- People with COVID-19 have reported a wide range of [symptoms](#), ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Some people do not have any symptoms.
- Symptoms may appear **two to 14 days after exposure** to the virus.
- People with the following symptoms may have COVID-19 (this does not include all possible symptoms):
 - Fever or chills
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle or body aches
 - Headache
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Sore throat
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Diarrhea
 - Older adults may also experience confusion, disorientation and falls

Who is at higher risk of getting COVID-19 or of having severe illness?

- Severe illness means that the person with COVID-19 may require hospitalization, intensive care, or a ventilator to help them breathe, or may even die. People who are at

[increased risk of severe illness](#) need to be especially careful to monitor their health and contact their health care provider if they have any symptoms.

- People who have regular close contact with others who have COVID-19, such as people who live in the same home, caregivers or intimate partners, are at higher risk of getting the virus.
- People age 50 and older are at increased risk for severe COVID-19 illness (with those age 65 and older at greatest risk). Also at increased risk are people who have underlying health conditions, including:
 - Chronic kidney disease
 - COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
 - Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from solid organ transplant
 - Obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 30 or higher)
 - Serious heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease or cardiomyopathies
 - Sickle cell disease
 - Type 2 diabetes mellitus

Staying Healthy

What can I do to help prevent COVID-19?

There are no vaccines or medicines to prevent COVID-19, although research for both is underway. The recommendations described below can help protect you and others from getting sick.

- [Stay home if sick](#). If you do not feel well, stay home and only leave for essential medical care (including [routine medical care](#) and [getting tested for COVID-19](#)) and essential errands that others cannot run for you. If you have symptoms and are 65 or older or have an underlying health condition, **call your health care provider right away** so they can monitor you more closely and advise you about testing.
- **Keep physical distance**. Whenever possible, stay at least 6 feet away from others.
 - If you have an underlying health condition or are 65 or older, consider staying home as much as possible to protect yourself even if you are not sick, except to seek medical care (including [getting tested for COVID-19](#)) and to run essential errands such as getting groceries and supplies, or getting solitary exercise.
 - When possible, ask others who are not sick and have lower risk for severe illness from COVID-19 to run necessary errands.
 - If you need to shop for food or other essentials yourself, choose to shop from stores that have delivery options or hours designated for shoppers at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19.
 - Try to socialize and work remotely whenever possible.

- **Practice healthy hand hygiene.** Wash your hands with soap and water often, especially when returning home. Wash for at least 20 seconds every time, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
 - Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
 - If you need to cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve, not your hands.
 - Do not shake hands. Wave instead.
- **Wear a face covering.** Whenever you leave your home, wear a [face covering](#) and make sure it covers your nose and mouth.

Even if you have had COVID-19, it is important that you continue to follow physical distancing recommendations, practice healthy hand hygiene and wear a face covering. We still do not know if you can get COVID-19 again.

What else can I do to stay well?

Stay in touch with your health care provider and make sure you make and keep appointments for routine care.

- Routine care includes seeing your provider for a chronic condition (such as high blood pressure, diabetes or heart disease), annual check-ups, vaccinations, health screenings and mental health visits.
 - Although there is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19, staying up to date on other vaccinations is important for your overall health.
 - When the flu vaccine is available, talk to your provider about receiving a flu vaccine. If you are over the age of 65, ask your provider for a flu vaccine specially formulated for people your age, and be sure to get vaccinated.
 - Ask your provider if you should receive the pneumonia vaccine and the shingles vaccine.
 - Many providers will have flu and pneumonia vaccines at their offices. Many pharmacies also administer flu, pneumonia and shingles vaccines – check with your local pharmacy to see which vaccines they carry. Visit the [NYC HealthMap](#) or call **311** to find a flu vaccination location near you.
 - Ask your provider for a 90-day supply of medicines you take regularly. Consider using a pharmacy that delivers to your home.
 - Stay in touch with your dentist to plan for routine dental care.
 - Stay up to date with eye exams and be sure to have a current pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses if you use them.
- Many providers can help you over the phone or through telemedicine visits, but in-person visits may also be needed for exams, vaccines and other care.
- Providers have increased infection control measures to make in-person care safe, including increased cleaning and disinfection practices, staggered in-person appointments, face covering requirements and designated office hours for those at high risk for severe illness.

- If you do not have a health care provider or your provider is not open, you can find a community health center near you that is accepting new patients by visiting nyc.gov/health/covidresources. You can also call 844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692) or **311** to find a provider near you. Care is available to all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status or ability to pay.

Be safe and manage risks for falls at home. Falls can cause serious injury or death, and can impact quality of life.

- Remove or repair trip and fall hazards. These include removing objects from the floor, fixing loose or torn carpet, securing throw rugs to the ground with rug tape, and coiling and securing electrical wires next to the wall.
- Review lighting. 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.
- Visit nyc.gov/health and search for [How to Prevent Falls: A Home Safety Checklist](#) to find ideas about protecting your home from fall hazards.
 - If small repairs are urgently needed in your home, talk to your building management or superintendent, or call your local hardware store and ask about contactless delivery options.
- Keep your feet pain-free and healthy. Keep feet clean and dry, keep toenails trimmed, and see a doctor for any foot problems or difficulty cutting nails.
- Avoid wearing house slippers with flimsy soles or wearing backless shoes like flip flops. Do not walk around your home in socks or stockings, and limit your time walking barefoot. Wear comfortable shoes that fit well, even at home.

What to Do When Sick

Are there specific steps I can take to be prepared, in case I or others in my home become sick?

- Maintain up-to-date lists of all the medicines you take regularly and all your health care providers, including their contact information.
- Have a plan for travelling to your provider or to a local testing site, if needed.
 - Some transportation services are available for essential medical appointments for people age 60 or older via community-based organizations. For more information, call [Aging Connect](#), the NYC Department for the Aging's (DFTA) information and referral contact center for older adults and their families, at 212-244-6469, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
 - Some insurance companies, including Medicaid, cover non-emergency transportation, including visits to a provider. Contact your health insurance company to find out what your plan covers and how to arrange for transportation.
- Consider your preferences for medical care and choosing a health care agent, in case you are unable to speak for yourself. Visit ny.gov and search for [advance care planning](#)

to find more information about writing down your wishes in an advance directive document.

- If you are a caregiver for another person such as a partner or child, or for a pet, have a plan for someone to care of them if you have COVID-19.
- If you require help from a caregiver, determine who can care for you if your caregiver is sick.
- Keep a thermometer and a supply of over-the-counter medicines, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), that would be safe for you to take.

When and how should I seek care for COVID-19, including testing for infection?

It is important to monitor your health and seek care or emergency medical attention for COVID-19 and other health problems when needed.

If you start having mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms, **call your health care provider right away** so they can monitor you more closely and advise you about testing.

- Stay home, except to get essential medical care (including [routine medical care](#) and [testing for COVID-19](#)) or basic needs such as groceries, if someone cannot get them for you.
- Do not go to work, even if you are an essential worker.
- Your provider may offer COVID-19 testing at their practice. You can also find a testing site near you by calling **311** or visiting nyc.gov/covidtest.
 - Tests are free at several testing sites.
 - If you test positive, you will receive a call from a trained Contact Tracer to make sure you get the medical care and support you need, including meals, medications and hotel accommodations if you cannot safely separate from others at home.
 - To learn more about the Test & Trace Corps and Contact Tracers, visit nyc.gov and search for [trace](#).
- Check in with your provider if you develop new symptoms or if your symptoms change. They can advise you about the need for further evaluation.

If you experience the following severe symptoms, go to an emergency room or call **911** immediately:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- New confusion or inability to stay awake
- Blue lips or face
- Difficulty speaking
- Sudden face drooping or numbness in the face, arm or leg
- Seizure
- Any sudden and severe pain
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Severe or persistent vomiting or diarrhea

- Any other emergency condition

Are there other times I should get tested?

Yes, all New Yorkers should get a COVID-19 diagnostic test, whether or not they have symptoms. There are two main types of tests:

- COVID-19 **diagnostic** tests (or virus tests) are swab or saliva tests used to identify whether someone **currently** has COVID-19 (whether they are currently sick). Tests are free at many sites. You can find a testing site near you by calling **311** or visiting nyc.gov/covidtest.
- COVID-19 **antibody** tests (or serology tests) are blood tests that may identify if someone was exposed to COVID-19 in the **past**. A positive test result **does not** mean you are immune to COVID-19 or that you cannot get it again.

For more information on COVID-19 testing, visit nyc.gov/health/coronavirus and search for [COVID-19 Testing: Frequently Asked Questions](#).

If you have already been tested and were found to be negative, you should get another test if:

- You have new symptoms of COVID-19
- You or your health care provider is concerned by a possible exposure, such as spending time in a large crowd or with someone who has confirmed or possible COVID-19
- You are planning to spend time with someone who does not live with you and is at highest risk for severe COVID-19 illness, including people age 65 or older

What can I do to keep everyone safe at home if I or someone else has COVID-19?

Create physical distance, and do not have visitors:

- If you are sick, stay at least 6 feet from others.
- Keep those who are sick separate from yourself or others at risk for serious illness.
- Move seating and other furniture around to maintain physical distance.
- Individuals who are sick should eat or be fed separately from others at home who are not sick, if possible.

Cover up:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a [face covering](#) when you are within 6 feet of others.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or your inner elbow. Do not use your hands.

Keep it clean:

- Throw tissues into the garbage immediately after use.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you cough or sneeze. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Frequently clean high-touch surfaces, such as doorknobs, light switches, faucets, phones, keys, children's favorite toys and remote controls.
- Wash towels, sheets, clothes and cloth face coverings at the warmest possible setting with your usual detergent, and dry completely.
- Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups or eating utensils, and wash them after every use.

I or someone else at home has COVID-19, but we cannot separate from other household members. What can I do?

NYC has free hotel rooms available for people who have COVID-19 or who live in a household where someone has COVID-19 and cannot safely separate from others at home. If you need this service, call **311** or 844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692) between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. A health care provider will assess your situation and refer you to a hotel if appropriate.

- At a hotel you will have access to free 24/7 monitoring by nurses and clinicians, all meals provided, access to mental health and wellness support, and the ability to make local phone calls to stay connected to loved ones.
- Caregivers (whether they have COVID-19 or care for someone who has COVID-19) can usually stay in a hotel with the person they are caring for.

Taking Care of Your Mental Health

These are difficult times. How can I manage stress, anxiety and social isolation?

- It is natural to feel overwhelmed, sad, anxious and afraid, or to experience other symptoms of distress, which may result in trouble sleeping or coping with alcohol or other substances.
- Stay connected with friends and loved ones via phone calls, social media and video chat.
- If you are not sick, go outside for solitary exercise, but remember to wear a face covering, stay at least 6 feet away from others and wash your hands often.
- Visit the [App Library](#) at nyc.gov/nycwell for online tools to help you manage your health and emotional well-being.
- NYC Well, a free and confidential behavioral health support service, has trained counselors available 24/7 to provide brief counseling and referrals to care. Call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355) or text “WELL” to 65173.
- For help with isolation and loneliness, you can stay connected with free, recurring social check-in calls from a volunteer by calling DFTA’s Aging Connect at 212-244-6469.

Additional City Resources to Help Keep You Safe and Healthy

What can I do if I feel unsafe in my home, or if I feel neglected, pressured or bullied by anyone?

- Call DFTA’s Elderly Crime Victims Resource Center at 212-442-3103 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.
- Call the NYC Family Justice Centers, which provide vital social services, civil legal and criminal justice assistance for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, including elder abuse. Services for survivors are available by phone, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 - Bronx: 718-508-1220
 - Brooklyn: 718-250-5113
 - Manhattan: 212-602-2800

- Queens: 718-575-4545
- Staten Island: 718-697-4300
- Call the NYC Elder Abuse Center Helpline for Concerned Persons at 212-746-6905, Monday through Friday, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.
- Call NYC's 24-hour hotline operated by Safe Horizon: 800-621-4673 at all other times.
- If you are experiencing an emergency, call **911**.

If I have trouble obtaining food while at home, what can I do?

- Department of Education meal hub sites provide three free meals a day, Monday through Friday. There is no registration or identification required. A household member or friend who is at lower risk for severe illness from COVID-19 can pick up meals for you. Visit nyc.gov/getfood or call **311** to find meal hub site locations.
- If you cannot go out to get food, no one can bring you food and you are not able to use private delivery options, NYC will delivery emergency meals to you. Visit nyc.gov/getfood or call **311** to learn more.

I am worried about staying cool and safe while at home during the summer. What can I do?

- Heat waves are not just uncomfortable — they can also cause heat-related illness or death and worsen existing health conditions. Using air conditioning is the best protection. Fans are not enough to keep you safe from heat during hot weather.
- If you have an air conditioner, make sure your unit is working. During a heat wave, turn on your unit and set it to 78 degrees Fahrenheit or “low” cool to stay safe, save on your electricity bill and save energy.
- Open windows and air conditioning will not increase your risk of getting COVID-19. If someone with COVID-19 is in your home, opening the windows or using air conditioning can increase air circulation, which may help stop the spread of COVID-19 by reducing the amount of virus in the air. If you open windows and are a caregiver for young children, make sure window guards are installed.
- If you do not have an air conditioner:
 - Apply for a free air conditioner through the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) if you meet income and other criteria. Visit nyc.gov/hra and search for [HEAP Cooling Application](#) or call 212-331-3126 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. for more information. The application is available in multiple languages.
 - Safely visit the home of someone you know who has a working air conditioner. Consider which friends or relatives you might be able to visit to seek relief from the heat.
 - If you cannot visit the home of someone you know, call **311** to find a cooling center in New York City during a heat wave.
- Pay attention to weather forecasts for an upcoming heat wave. Stay informed about emergencies and be alert for official government messages.
 - Sign up for Notify NYC, the City's official emergency communications program by visiting nyc.gov/notifynyc or calling **311**.

- For more information about staying safe in the heat, visit nyc.gov/health/heat.
- Summer storms and hot weather can sometimes result in power outages.
 - Tell your utility provider if you use electric-powered medical equipment. They can let you know if power problems are expected in your area. Even if utilities are included in your rent, you are still eligible for this service from your utility provider.
 - Be ready for an emergency. Make sure you have backup batteries or oxygen tanks, if needed.
- For more information about preparing for a power outage, visit nyc.gov/health and search for [power outage](#).

I need help with other local services or issues such as finances, housing or utilities. Where can I find more information or resources?

- For general information on City services and support, including finances and consumer protection, housing and utilities, and health and safety, visit nyc.gov/agingcovid.
- You can also find information about local resources in your neighborhood, such as primary care clinics, pharmacies, grocery stores and food pantries, community organizations, and financial or legal help by visiting nyc.gov/health/covidresources.
- To apply for NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) services, including SNAP and cash assistance, visit nyc.gov/accesshra, or download the [ACCESS HRA mobile app](#). If you cannot access the website or mobile app, call **311**.

For general information about COVID-19, visit nyc.gov/health/coronavirus or cdc.gov/covid19. For real-time updates, text “COVID” to 692-692. Message and data rates may apply.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

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