



# "COVID-19 - A GUIDE FOR FAMILY AND CARERS OF OLDER PEOPLE"

Older adults, aged 65 years and older, are at a higher risk of contracting Coronavirus Disease and can become more ill. At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), so the best way to keep your loved ones safe from infection is to keep them away from contact with the virus.

**THIS GUIDE IS FOR FAMILY AND CARERS OF OLDER PEOPLE, TO HELP THEM REDUCE THE RISK OF THEIR LOVED ONE CONTRACTING THE DISEASE AS WELL TO HELP CAREGIVERS THEMSELVES.**

For more info. on coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Call: 16000, or visit: [www.moph.gov.qa](http://www.moph.gov.qa)



# What is your role as family member and/or caregiver?

Some older adults will resist changes to their routines and adapting to the new COVID-19 lifestyle. Remember that these are extraordinary times; the uncertainty along with home confinement and isolation from friends and family can be stressful and overwhelming.

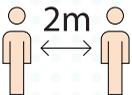
The best way to prevent and slow down transmission of the disease is to be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the symptoms and how it spreads. Protect yourself and others from infection by encouraging frequent hand washing and monitoring who comes into contact with your family and especially your elderly relative.

**You can be the safety gatekeeper for the older person in your care by establishing practical infection prevention and control measures, including:**



## Washing Hands

- Encourage frequent cleaning of hands with soap and water or alcohol-based rub, both for you and person you care especially:
- After any type of contact with someone who is ill or any surfaces they may have touched.
- Before, during and after preparing food.
- Before and after eating.
- After using the toilet.
- Identify frequently touched surfaces by the person who has COVID-19 and clean and disinfect them daily.
- Wear a medical mask when in the same room with the person who has COVID-19. Do not touch the mask or face during use and discard it afterward.
- Use dedicated dishes cups, eating utensils, towels and bed linens for the person who has COVID-19. Wash them with soap and water.



## Practicing Physical Distancing

It can be hard to limit family visits, especially on special occasions and elderly relatives might insist on seeing the grandchildren or having family gatherings. However, for their own safety, please insist on everyone adhering to strict safety protocols when coming to the house.

## What do you need to know about 'physical distancing' and how can you introduce this at home to keep your loved one safe?

Physical distancing means limiting your contact with others to prevent the virus from using you as a carrier to spread further.



For those most at risk for severe infection, it is important that we do everything we can to reduce their risk of exposure to the virus. Simple things like frequent handwashing, avoiding crowds, limiting time in public places, trying to keep a distance from others, and staying at home if we are sick, can make a big difference in reducing our risk of becoming infected, and of infecting others- including the older adults in our life.

If there are children living in the house with an elderly relative, please ensure they do not go to the rooms where the older person spends most of their time (such as the bedroom or private sitting room). Do not allow any physical contact with their grandparents, as hugs and kisses can lead to the spread of infection.

## How can you socialize with your elderly relative while keeping a safe physical distance?

The internet can be a wonderful tool for learning new skills, entertainment and staying connected with others. If the older adult in your life is not already online, you can help them to learn how to use new technology to talk to family and friends.

If your loved one is not familiar with technology, make it part of your routine to check in a few times each day by phone. Physical distancing does not mean social isolation, and even a potentially deadly virus should not force us to be alone. Now, more than ever, people need to find smart ways to stay connected and safe.

In extended households where children are used to interacting with their grandparents- maybe introduce a 'social hour' where the children can sit at least two meters away and listen to a story or have a conversation with their grandparent. But ensure they do not hug or kiss them to be safe.

When the world is in a state of panic, we need to remember that remaining hopeful can help people to deal with a new way of living. While it is best to distance yourself from older adults at this stage in the pandemic; however, you can still keep them in the loop.

Let them know what is going on by keeping them up to date with daily news. In your phone calls or video chats, talk about normal daily occurrences as well as plans for the future to give them something to look forward to.



## TIPS FOR HOW YOU CAN HELP EASE THE IMPACT OF PHYSICAL DISTANCING



**Limit the non-essentials:** Encourage the older adults in your life to cancel any appointments and outings that are not essential. If it is essential, **contact a healthcare provider on the COVID-19 hotline ( # 16000)** and ask for advice.



**Since it is best to keep a physical distance,** you can offer to **have conversations via phone calls,** video chats and e-mail. Talk about what matters to you and to them. Talk about normal every day things while also checking that they feel physically well and continue to eat healthy, drink enough liquids as well as exercise and rest as required.



**Offer help:** If you live with any older adults or are in contact with them as a family member or a neighbor, ask how you can help them – whether it is a medication refill, or if they need groceries. Let them know you care and are there to help them. Respect their autonomy and self-rule but also ensure they are aware of why you are doing certain things to keep them safe.



**Communicate:** Do not be too negative but try to communicate effectively and calmly. We all need hope in times like these, so remember to pass it on to the older adults in your life. This is a stressful time, now more than ever; it is good to be patient and practice peaceful unity.

## What general advice should you give to your elderly relative or care recipient?

Every person ages differently; while some might be more homebound due to their existing health condition, others might be active and used to leading an independent and energetic life.

### Do Not:



**Visit any crowded places** – Let someone else do the food shopping or visit the chemist if needed.



**Attend any social gatherings** – Birthdays, weddings and any other special occasions outside the house as well as inside the home! These can be celebrated another time, as they are not as important as your health.



**Have physical contact with anyone who is sick** – event if they may only have a simple cold, they may also be carrying the coronavirus.

## Do:



**Eat regular healthy meals**, with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, to help boost your body's natural immune system.



**Drink plenty of liquids**, preferably water.



**Take medication as prescribed**, check they have taken their daily medication and how many doses they have left to see if a repeat prescription is required.



**Keep as physically fit as you can**, within the confines of your home and subject to your health condition. Some form of daily exercise helps improve blood circulation and lung function.



**Keep your mind active, with reading**, using the internet to learn a new skill or play games and staying in touch with friends and family through the telephone or social media.

**Loneliness and boredom in older people can lead to depression and early cognitive decline – so help your older loved ones to keep active, socially and physically, but while still keeping a safe distance from others.**

## What should you do if you suspect a potential infection in the older person in your care?

Common signs of COVID-19 include fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. As the virus becomes more severe, the infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.

If your elderly relative experiences any of these symptoms, **please call the national COVID-19 hotline on #16000** for further assistance.

Older adults may be less likely than younger individuals to run a fever when they have an infection so if they have other symptoms of an infection or are feeling poorly, it is better to get checked them out.

## What should you do if you suspect you may have some kind of infection?

If you or anyone else in your family or household, who has been in contact with your elderly relative, exhibit any signs of having flu-like symptoms you should call the COVID-19 hotline for advice on how to proceed further.

Make sure you keep your distance from your loved ones and adopt extra special hand-hygiene until you are sure you do not carry the virus and can transfer it to others.

**REMEMBER IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT FOR PRIMARY CAREGIVERS TO LOOK AFTER THEIR OWN HEALTH!**

Caregiving can be more stressful at this time, especially if dealing with someone who may have a cognitive impairment due to dementia and may not understand the restrictions imposed on them, even if they are for their own good.

It is therefore important for the caregiver to monitor their own physical and psychological wellbeing. Try to identify any options that may exist for alleviating the burden of care or providing some respite.

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE - DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP.**  
**Call the COVID-19 hotline number #16000 and ask to speak to healthcare professional for mental health and wellbeing support.**

## **What about having to take regular medication and how can I get repeat prescriptions?**

For anyone who has to take regular medication it is important that they continue with this practice. Older people with chronic conditions who need to take their medicines can be reminded by their relatives or carers to do so.

If the older person needs physical help in taking the medications, make sure whoever gives the medication washed their hand well before and after completing the task.

Ensure your elderly relative has enough medication doses so they do not run out. If they are running low, you can arrange for a repeat prescription by calling the COVID-19 hotline.

Please arrange to pick up the prescription and medication and discourage your elderly relative from engaging in this task to avoid the risk of infection.

**If you call the COVID-19 hotline on #16000** you can check if the person you care for is eligible to have their medicines delivered to them.

## When in doubt – who to contact?

The Ministry of Public Health in Qatar has established a dedicated website ([www.moph.gov.qa](http://www.moph.gov.qa)) to provide the public with updates on the current situation as well as information on how to protect themselves and others from COVID-19. A

**hotline (16000) is also available 24-hours a day to answer COVID-19 related queries. While in many instances sharing is considered a form of caring but not if someone is carrying the COVID-19 virus. Do not put yourself or your loved ones at risk.**



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