



COVID-19 RESPONSE

CAREGIVING DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Learn about caring for a loved one during pandemic.

Within the last month, Oklahoma and the rest of the U.S. entered an unprecedented time in our lives. As COVID-19 has continued to spread, public officials have implemented new policies regarding social spaces, increasing to shelter-in-place orders across the state. Families are left to figure out how to both work from home, as well as help continue their children's educations. But in this time, there also are concerns about those families who are caring for an aging relative.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted by close contact with an infected person (through droplets produced when they cough or sneeze) or coming in contact with a surface or object that has the droplets on it, then touching their mouth, nose or eyes. Some symptoms include fever, cough and shortness of breath. While some patients have reported mild cases, individuals with weakened immune systems, such as older adults, are at an increased risk for severe – even deadly – respiratory symptoms.

So what can caregivers do to protect themselves and their loved ones? First and foremost, it is vital as the caregiver to keep yourself well. Some tips include:

1. Wash your hands frequently and for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water.
2. Avoid crowds.
3. Cough or sneeze into the bend of your elbow or disposable tissue.
4. Clean frequently touched surfaces in your home often – including mobility and medical equipment.

To keep your loved one well:

1. Take your loved one to the emergency room only if they have difficulty breathing or a very high fever, otherwise call your healthcare provider (this helps reduce their risk of exposure).
2. Ask your healthcare provider about telehealth options. Medicare has expanded benefits for telehealth options.
3. Put extra written reminders around the house about hand washing to help remind your loved one. Hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol also can help.
4. Think ahead about alternate plans in case you, as the primary caregiver, become ill.

In these times, it is important to remember social distancing does not mean isolation. Encourage your loved one to think beyond their circle of friends and reach out

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to neighbors or congregation members (reminding them about social distance rules). Thankfully, technology can help with social distancing during this time. Show your loved one how to video chat with a friends and family (or dial the phone for them). You also can ask other family members to write letters or cards to help lift your loved one's spirit.

Above all, always ensure your loved one feels included. As we all are homebound, it may be a good idea to ask your loved one to complete a project. Be sure that the project is something excites them and keeps them engaged, though it does not need to be a large project.

References

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