

## **COVID-19 Resources for Older Adults**

While older adults and their loved ones are practicing physical distancing due to the spread of COVID-19, it's important now more than ever to continue to find ways to connect with our family, friends, and community.

To support our community while we shelter in place, AgeGuide will be updating this resource guide with a new topic each week to help older adults and their loved ones stay informed, healthy and connected. Resources to support older adults and families during COVID-19 are also available on our website [here](#).

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Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns

**AgeGuide Northeastern Illinois**  
630-293-5990 or at [info@ageguide.org](mailto:info@ageguide.org)

# Staying Engaged During Physical Distancing

## Feeling Lonely? Would you like a friend to talk to?

The following organizations are offering friendly phone calls to older adults who are interested in receiving calls on a regular basis to check in on them and provide friendly conversation and reduce feelings of loneliness.

### DuPage County

Tri-Town YMCA Sunshine Seniors Phone Call Program connects volunteers with older adults who wish to receive a daily check-in call and want someone to say hello to for a few minutes. Call (630) 629-9622 or visit [www.tritownymca.org](http://www.tritownymca.org)

### Grundy & Will Counties

The Crisis Line of Will and Grundy Counties offers Friendly Phone Calls through its Sunshine Calls program. This program calls older adults, persons with disabilities and home-bound individuals to provide a friendly chat to check on their well-being. Call (815) 744-5280 or visit [www.willfinduhelp.org](http://www.willfinduhelp.org)

### Kane, Kendall & McHenry Counties

Senior Services Associates is offering Friendly Phone Calls to older adults who are looking to talk with someone who cares. Those who are interested may also choose to enroll in the Senior Companion/Friendly Visiting Program. Kane: (847) 741-0404 Kendall: (630) 553-5777 McHenry: (815) 344-3555 or [seniorservicesassoc.org](http://seniorservicesassoc.org)

### Kankakee County

Catholic Charities Diocese of Joliet Sunshine Callers Program connects volunteers with home-bound older adults for phone calls that provide a friendly chat, a security check and informal assistance. Call (815) 932-1921 or visit [www.cc-doj.org](http://www.cc-doj.org)

### Lake County

ElderCARE of Lake County is temporarily transitioning their Friendly Visiting program to friendly phone conversations to engage older adults and assess what needs they might have during this time. Call (847) 406-4683 or email [info@eldercarelakecounty.org](mailto:info@eldercarelakecounty.org)  
Lake County Sheriff's Office "Are You Okay?" (R.U.O.K) is a personal wellness check made by phone to home-bound residents at a pre-determined time each day. Contact [Community Services Team via email](#) or at (847) 377-4211

## **Additional Resources: Stay Engaged During Physical Distancing**

### **Covia Well Connected**

FREE phone and online program offering activities, education, friendly conversation, classes and support groups targeting older adults. The current catalog can be found [here](#).

### **Mather Lifeways Telephone Topics**

Participants call a toll-free number to listen to a wide range of interesting discussions and programs. There is no cost to participate. Call (888) 600-2560 to get started. To learn more, [click here](#).

### **Institute on Aging's Friendship Line**

The Friendship Line is the Institute on Aging's 24-hour toll-free accredited crisis line for persons aged 60 years and older and adults living with disabilities. To speak with a friend, call (800) 971.0016. The Friendship Line is also a crisis intervention hotline providing around the clock crisis support services.

### **Need help with your mobile device?**

Not sure how to use your mobile device (tablet, smartphone or laptop) to connect to online programs? Check out these fact sheets on how to use mobile devices for social connection:

[Apple Mobile Device](#)

[Android Mobile Device](#)

### **Looking for activities to do while at home?**

AgeGuide also compiled virtual activities including virtual tours of museums, zoos, national parks and more to keep older adults connected during this time. To view the list, [click here](#).

# Resources to Support Caregivers while Sheltering in Place

## **Are you caring for a loved one? Are you feeling overwhelmed?**

There are organizations that offer valuable resources for those who are caring for an adult 60+ and for those with Alzheimer's disease or a related disorder. There are also resources available for relatives raising children. These resources include respite services, financial assistance, legal services, Caregiver Counseling Centers, training and education and support groups. There is a Caregiver Resource Center in each county to help you access the services you need.

## **Not sure who to contact?**

**Caregiver Resource Centers** give you information about available services. The Centers assess your situation and help connect you to programs to assist you.

**Caregiver Counseling Centers** help to coach/counsel you through troubling times, such as bringing the family together or helping an older adult accept needed services.

To find a Caregiver Resource Center or Caregiver Counseling Center in your county, [click here](#).

## **Additional Resources: Recorded Webinars/Teleconferences** for Caregiver Support and Information

### **AARP Weekly Tele-Town Hall**

AARP is hosting weekly live Tele-Town Hall with Coronavirus Information on Thursdays at 12pm

[AARP Live Tele-Town Hall](#)

### **National Health Council Webinar (Recorded on March 26)**

[Coronavirus Preparedness for People with Chronic Diseases: What Do Caregivers Need to Know?](#)

### **Wellmed Caregiver Support Webinar (English) (Recorded on March 18)**

[Coping With the Coronavirus Outbreak while Caregiving](#)

### **Wellmed Caregiver Support Webinar (Spanish) (Recorded on March 27)**

[Cómo Hacerle Frente al Brote del Coronavirus en su Papel de Cuidador](#)

### **Alzheimer's Foundation**

[Coronavirus Information for Alzheimer's Caregivers](#) (English & Spanish)

Includes COVID-19 information for families affected by Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. It also includes steps caregivers can take to help prevent the spread, caregiving tips and therapeutic activities.

**Alzheimer's Association**

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Tips for Dementia Caregivers](#)

**National Alliance of Caregiving and Caring Across Generations**

[See Tips for Sandwich Caregivers in the Era of COVID-19](#)

This tip sheet can be helpful to all caregivers responsible for both the young and old.

**Resources for Relatives Raising Children**

Illinois State Board of Education, Meals available during COVID-19

[isbe.net/nutrition](https://isbe.net/nutrition)

Some districts have expanded meal services to include any child under the age of 18. Call your school district office or school office to find specifics including days and times of meal pick-up.

Call 211 to find additional food resources in the community.

For more information on services available through AgeGuide for relatives raising children, [click here](#).

# **Access to Meals for Older Adults while Sheltering in Place**

## **Are you in need of meals during COVID-19?**

Making sure older adults receive the nutrition they need during the Coronavirus pandemic is a top priority in Illinois. We want to ensure the health, safety and welfare of older adults. Because of this, the home delivered meals program is being expanded to include anyone who is 60 and older. Meals are available on a temporary basis until further notice. There is a Care Coordination Unit in each county that can help you sign up for meals. To receive meals yourself or learn more about getting meals for a loved one, [click here](#).

During the shelter in place order, select Community Dining locations are providing carry out meals for older adults. If you are interested in carry-out meals:

Contact the [Care Coordination Unit](#) in your county to register for the program

Call your preferred Community Dining location and reserve a meal (Participants must be registered in the program and make a reservation for a meal in advance).

Any older adult who is concerned about accessing food or experiencing other concerns during this crisis, is encouraged to reach out to the Care Coordination Unit in their county for assistance.

## **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefit Information**

SNAP is the largest federal nutrition assistance program. SNAP provides benefits to eligible low-income individuals and families via an Electronic Benefits Transfer card. This card can be used like a debit card to purchase eligible food in authorized retail food stores. If you are interested in more information or applying for SNAP benefits, please contact the [Care Coordination Unit](#) in your county.

If you are a SNAP recipient who receives less than the monthly maximum SNAP allotment for your household size, you will receive supplemental emergency SNAP allotment to bring you up to the maximum benefit in April and May 2020.

April 2020 emergency allotments were made available to active SNAP households on or before April 20, 2020. May 2020 emergency allotments should have been available around the same date the emergency allotment was received in April.

For more information, [click here](#).

SNAP interview requirements have been adjusted due to the Coronavirus. Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) is allowing an adjustment in requiring a SNAP household to be interviewed prior to the approval of benefits. This adjustment applies to all initial applications, including expedited cases, requiring an interview from March 01, 2020 through May 31, 2020.

For more information, [click here](#).

## Other Nutrition Resources for Older Adults

Food safety is very important especially for older adults and anyone with a weakened immune system. The good news is that food borne illness is preventable. We should all be extra diligent about food safety during this pandemic so we can stay as healthy as possible. Just a few basic precautions can really make a big difference. Remember, harmful bacteria can be present in foods before we can see or smell it! “When in doubt, throw it out.” Freezing is a good way to extend the storage life of foods, so properly wrap and label items for the freezer to use later. The key to freezing is to split larger items and freeze in meal size portions. Remember to cook all foods to the proper temperature and remember to heat leftovers to 165oF

More information: [foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/4-steps-to-food-safety](https://foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/4-steps-to-food-safety)

Follow the guidelines below for storing food in the refrigerator and freezer. The short time limits for home-refrigerated foods will help keep them from spoiling or becoming dangerous to eat. Avoid cross-contamination by using separate utensils, plates, and cutting boards for raw and cooked foods. Just always think, “If raw food has touched a plate, utensil or cutting board then use a different one for the cooked product.”

More information: [foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/cold-food-storage-charts](https://foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/cold-food-storage-charts)

The resources on this page align with the CDC messaging and offer science-based information about supporting health with good nutrition during this pandemic.

More information: [eatright.org/coronavirus](https://eatright.org/coronavirus)

## Food Pantry Resources

Local Food Pantry Finder - Call to Check Hours

[solvehungertoday.org/get-help/where-to-get-food](https://solvehungertoday.org/get-help/where-to-get-food)

Mobile Food Pantries Calendar

[solvehungertoday.org/get-help/mobile-pantry-calendar](https://solvehungertoday.org/get-help/mobile-pantry-calendar)

# Shape Your Future with the US Census

## How 10 Minutes can Change the World!

These are unprecedented and uncertain times, but there's one thing you can control that makes a big difference in your corner of the world - filling out your 2020 US Census. By now you should have received an invitation to go online to [my2020census.gov](https://my2020census.gov), call (844) 330-2020, or mail in your form to complete your Census. It takes less than ten minutes to complete.

## Put the Us in Census

The global pandemic has forced all of us to stop and evaluate what we value and what our purpose is. As we shelter at home and physically distance from friends and loved ones, we're compelled to acknowledge our interconnectedness and how each one of us has a role to play in fighting the spread of this deadly virus. Here's your chance to make a big impact without leaving your house. The Census is about all of us. Everybody counts.

## How it Helps

The US Census effects political representation as well as financial resources for your neighborhood, town, city, and state. More than \$34 billion in federal funding was directed to Illinois based on the 2010 Census. This funding supports important services like senior housing, Medicare Part B, Home Delivered Meals, hospitals, and first responders.

## Leave A Legacy

The Census allows you to make a difference to future generations. The impact of this year's census will be felt for the next decade. Just think of it, a grandchild born today will be ten years old before the next census. The Census you complete today will impact the quality of your grandchild's schools, health, and neighborhoods. You can make sure the next generation flourishes by making sure you get counted.

## \$1,400 for 10 Minutes

Wouldn't it be fun to be a philanthropist and go around giving out large donations to your community for libraries, public colleges, local parks, and hospitals? Well, guess what? You can! Each Census response is worth \$1,400 a year, almost \$17,000 over the next ten years, to our state. Those nine simple questions can make a world of difference for you, for future generations, and for all of us!



## **Now is the Time**

In an effort to make sure the Census isn't overshadowed by the virus, the U.S. Census Bureau has delayed the timeline for completion. The Census deadline is now extended until October 31, but Illinois residents have already stepped up to the plate. In the three weeks since invitations went out to households, 50 percent of Illinois residents responded — a rate that places us in the top 10 in the nation. Complete your Census today.

## **Get Social While You're Distancing**

Want to kick your impact up a notch? Complete your census and then show us your selfie! Show us you count and post a picture of yourself using #CensusSelfieChallenge and tag @AgeGuide on Facebook or Twitter. Let's get a movement going around the census!

## **Other Census Resources for Older Adults**

### **AgeGuide Census Resources Page**

[ageguide.org/advocacy/census](https://ageguide.org/advocacy/census)

### **[VIDEO] How-To Guide to Completing the 2020 Census Online**

[youtube.com/watch?v=vCM0XrSynFw&t=5s](https://youtube.com/watch?v=vCM0XrSynFw&t=5s)

### **AARP: Is It the Census or Is It a Scam?**

[learn.aarp.org/is-it-the-census-or-is-it-a-scam](https://learn.aarp.org/is-it-the-census-or-is-it-a-scam)

### **How to Identify a Census Employee**

[census.gov/about/regions/chicago/contact/identify.html](https://census.gov/about/regions/chicago/contact/identify.html)

Follow AgeGuide on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for the most up to date information on the Census!

# Avoid Coronavirus Scams

## Don't fall victim to a scam!

The Coronavirus is not only causing physical harm to people's health, but also financial harm as scam artists are trying to take advantage of vulnerable people. Scammers are preying on fears surrounding the Coronavirus to obtain money and financial information. These scams come in all different forms including emails, texts and social media posts. Below are some helpful tips to avoid falling for a Coronavirus scam.

- Don't respond to texts, emails or calls about checks from the government.
- Ignore online offers for vaccinations. There are no products proven to treat or prevent COVID-19 at this time.
- Be wary of ads for test kits. The [FDA just announced](#) approval for one home test kit, which requires a doctor's order. Most test kits being advertised have not been approved by the FDA, and may not be accurate.
- Hang up on robocalls. Scammers are using [illegal robocalls](#) to pitch everything from low-priced health insurance to work-at-home schemes.
- Watch for emails claiming to be from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or World Health Organization (WHO). Use sites like [coronavirus.gov](#) and [usa.gov/coronavirus](#) to get the latest information. And [don't click on links from sources you don't know](#).
- Do your homework when it comes to [donations](#). Never donate in cash, by gift card, or by wiring money.
- Do not give your Medicare number to anyone other than your doctor or other healthcare provider.

Source: Federal Trade Commission

## Report Coronavirus Scams

### How to report:

- Contact the U.S. Department of Justice's [National Elder Fraud Hotline](#) at 833-FRAUD-11 (833-372-8311). The hotline is staffed by counselors and case-managers every day 6am to 11pm.
- [File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission](#). Reports go into the FTC's Consumer Sentinel Database, and are shared with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. (Data from Coronavirus-related consumer complaints submitted to the FTC is available at [ftc.gov/exploredata](#)).
- If it's a cyber scam, [file an Internet Crime Complaint with the FBI](#).

**Adult Protective Services** and Older Americans Act legal assistance programs can also support people who have been targeted by scams. Contact AgeGuide if you need assistance at (800) 528-2000

Source: Administration on Community Living

### **Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Program**

The Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Program empowers consumers to prevent healthcare fraud. Program staff and volunteers help people with Medicare and Medicaid to:

1. **PROTECT** themselves from Medicare & Medicaid fraud, waste, and abuse.
2. **DETECT** Medicare & Medicaid fraud, waste, and abuse.
3. **REPORT** Medicare & Medicaid fraud, waste, and abuse.

The Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Program works to ensure fewer people become victims of healthcare fraud. With training and support from the Illinois SMP Program and its partners, SMP volunteers provide outreach and education in their communities. By giving presentations to groups, hosting exhibits at community events, and providing one-on-one counseling, volunteers help spread the message of Protect, Detect, and Report healthcare fraud.

[Coronavirus Tip Sheet](#) (English)

[Coronavirus Tip Sheet](#) (Spanish)

For more information or to volunteer for Senior Medicare Patrol at AgeGuide, contact Glenda Love at 630-293-5990 or [glove@ageguide.org](mailto:glove@ageguide.org)

### **Other Resources about Scams for Older Adults**

Beware of Scams Related to the Coronavirus

[consumerfinance.gov/about-us/blog/beware-coronavirus-related-scams](https://consumerfinance.gov/about-us/blog/beware-coronavirus-related-scams)

Avoid Scams while Finding Help during Quarantine

[consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2020/04/avoid-scams-while-finding-help-during-quarantine](https://consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2020/04/avoid-scams-while-finding-help-during-quarantine)

Coronavirus Scams Spread as Fraudsters Follow the Headlines

[aarp.org/money/scams-fraud/info-2020/coronavirus](https://aarp.org/money/scams-fraud/info-2020/coronavirus)

# Telehealth: A New Way to Connect with Healthcare Professionals during COVID-19

Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, you've probably found yourself craving personal interactions during this time of physical distancing. Many of us have turned to technology from telephones to video chats and conference calls to stay connected with family and friends. These virtual interactions are a lifeline that allows us to experience some sense of togetherness, but when it comes to your health, is there any substitute for a face-to-face with your doctor or healthcare provider?

One area that is evolving very quickly during the COVID-19 pandemic is healthcare. The public health emergency has forced us to adopt digital health technologies to a greater degree than ever before. Here's what you need to know.

## Healthcare Goes Virtual

Telehealth, or virtual visits, allows physicians and other health care providers to deliver services to their patients via phone or video. To protect older adults at a higher risk for COVID-19, Medicare participants are able to use telehealth for the duration of the public health crisis. Providers, including doctors, nurse practitioners, clinical psychologists, and licensed clinical social workers can now offer telehealth to patients in their homes so older adults can avoid going to a doctor's office or hospital where they would risk exposure to the virus.

## Types of Remote Medicare Visits

Medicare has outlined three types of allowable remote healthcare visits:

- **Medicare telehealth visits:** Patients may use telecommunication technology for office, hospital visits and other services that normally occur in-person. This requires the use of a device such as an iPad, tablet, smartphone or laptop computer that has internet connection and audio and video capability (in other words, not just an audio-only telephone) to facilitate real-time communication between provider and patient.
- **Virtual Check-Ins:** Established Medicare patients may have a brief (5-10 minute) communication with practitioners via a number of communication devices including telephone or video.
- **E-Visits:** Established Medicare patients may have non-face-to-face patient-initiated communication with their doctors without going to the doctor's office by using online patient portals.

While several commercial health plans and The Veteran's Administration (VA) Hospitals are allowing the use of audio-only phones for telehealth visits, Medicare is not. Only the second two options, which are limited to existing patients, allow for the use of a telephone.

## Virtual Health Resources

### Have symptoms of COVID-19 but it is not an emergency?

The Remote Patient Monitoring Program utilizes Telehealth Services and Pandemic Health Workers (PHW) to provide virtual, in-home health and mental health services. This new program is available to anyone in the state regardless of whether they are insured. Pandemic Health Workers will digitally connect with patients who are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and need to stay home or quarantine to protect themselves and others.

If you have symptoms, call the COVID-19 hotline at 833-673-5669. More information can be found [here](#)

It's important for everyone to keep in mind that urgent and emergent healthcare procedures will continue as scheduled in offices, clinics and hospitals. **Anyone experiencing acute health problems should still go to their nearest hospital emergency room.**

### *Need emotional support?*

*Call4Calm*, The Illinois Department of Human Services' free-of-charge emotional support text line, is for any residents experiencing stress or mental health issues related to COVID-19. Just text "TALK" (or "HABLAR" for Spanish) to 5-5-2-0-2-0, to speak with a mental health professional. You'll receive a call from a counselor within 24 hours.

### *Resources for Veterans*

If you are a military veteran and don't have an internet compatible device, you can get an iPad through the VA Tablet Loan Program. The iPads allow veterans to communicate with their doctors from home using a video calling app, as well as enabling them to easily track and send relevant health data. Ask your VA healthcare provider for more information.

### *Need help using technology?*

This [website](#) will help you learn to use your smart phone, computer or tablet. Find hundreds of tutorials on topics like smart phone basics, web cameras, video conferencing, email, and more.

### *Need more information on telemedicine*

See this [fact sheet](#)

## Watch for Signs of Abuse toward Older Adults and/or Persons with Disabilities during COVID-19

The safety measures put in place to protect older adults and people with disabilities from COVID-19, unfortunately, also put them at a greater risk for abuse and exploitation.

Because of the pandemic, adult children may have returned to their parent's home due to job loss which may be causing emotional and financial strain. Older Adults may be living with a spouse or other loved one who suffers from alcohol and/or drug addiction and feel they have no way to escape the situation. An older adult may rely on the care of others to assist them with living in the home. Caregivers are experiencing higher levels of exhaustion and burn out due to lack of formal assistance like adult day services, and in-home care. Some caregivers have opted to stop in home assistance to protect their loved one from COVID-19 and as a result, they are providing around the clock care. Due to the Shelter-in-Place order, it is hard for an older adult, or caregiver to seek relief or refuge from difficult situations that may be heightened during this crisis.

Now, more than ever, we need to check in on older adults who might be at risk of physical, emotional, and financial abuse.

### What is abuse?

Abuse refers to any negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable older adult or an adult (age 18 to 59) with a disability. Abuse can be caused by a loved one, a hired caregiver or a stranger. Abuse can happen at home, at a relative's home, or in an eldercare facility.

There are many types of abuse, the most obvious being physical abuse. Abuse can also consist of emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, neglect, and abandonment. Illinois law now considers self-neglect to be a form of elder abuse as well.

**Self Neglect** is a condition resulting from a person's inability to take care of themselves due to physical and/or mental impairments or a diminished capacity that threatens their own health. Essential self-care tasks include providing essential food, clothing, shelter, and health care; and obtaining goods and services necessary to maintain physical health, mental health, emotional well-being, and general safety.

### What are some signs of abuse?

- Withdrawal from normal activities, depression, or confusion
- Isolation from friends and family (more so than with the current stay at home order)
- Unexplained bruises, burns, broken bones or scars

- Appearance is dirty, under-nourished, dehydrated, over- or under-medicated, or not receiving needed care for medical problems
- Bed sores or other preventable conditions
- Recent changes in banking or spending patterns
- Strained or tense relationships, frequent arguments between the caregiver and older adult

### **How can abuse be prevented?**

Educating older adults, adults with disabilities, professionals, caregivers, and the public on abuse is critical to prevention. On an individual level, use some simple but vital steps to reduce the risk:

- Take care of your health
- Seek professional help for drug, alcohol and depression concerns, and urge family members to get help for these problems
- Attend support groups for spouses and learn about domestic violence services
- Plan for your own future. With a power of attorney or a living will, health care decisions can be addressed to avoid confusion and family problems, should you become incapacitated. Seek independent advice from someone you trust before signing any documents
- Stay active in the community and connected with friends and family. This will decrease social isolation, which has been connected to abuse
- Know your rights. If you engage the services of a paid or family caregiver, you have the right to voice your preferences and concerns
- If you live in a Nursing Home or Assisted Living, call your Long-Term Care Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is your advocate and has the power to intervene on your behalf.

### **Who do I call if I suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation?**

**Call 911 immediately if someone is in immediate, life-threatening danger.**

If the danger is not immediate, but you suspect that abuse has occurred or is occurring, please tell someone. Relay your concerns to the local Adult Protective Services provider agency, Long-Term Care Ombudsman (for nursing homes/assisted living), or police.

## **AgeGuide Adult Protective Services Providers**

### **DuPage County**

DuPage County Community Services

(630) 407-6500

[www.dupageco.org/community](http://www.dupageco.org/community)

### **Grundy & Kankakee Counties**

Catholic Charities Diocese of Joliet

(815) 932-1921

[www.catholiccharitiesjoliet.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesjoliet.org)

### **Kane County - North**

Senior Services Associates, Inc.

(847) 741-0404

[www.seniorservicesassoc.org](http://www.seniorservicesassoc.org)

### **Kane County - South**

Senior Services Associates, Inc.

(630) 897-4035

[www.seniorservicesassoc.org](http://www.seniorservicesassoc.org)

### **Kendall County**

Senior Services Associates, Inc.

(630) 553-5777

[www.seniorservicesassoc.org](http://www.seniorservicesassoc.org)

### **Lake County**

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago

(847) 546-5733

[www.catholiccharities.net](http://www.catholiccharities.net)

### **McHenry County**

Senior Services Associates, Inc.

(815) 356-7457

[www.seniorservicesassoc.org](http://www.seniorservicesassoc.org)

### **Will County**

Guardian Angel Community Services

(815) 729-0930

[www.gacsprograms.org](http://www.gacsprograms.org)



# Keeping Long Term Care Residents Engaged and Safe During COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, senior living communities are on the front lines of this crisis. About 11,500 cases of Coronavirus and over 1,550 deaths are linked to nursing homes in Illinois. AgeGuide's service area has been especially hard hit. Four of our counties, DuPage, Kane, Lake, and Will are among the hardest hit in the state, with over 100 cases each.

Even though senior living communities are not allowing visitors, we need to protect the residents, their rights and keep them socially engaged while remaining safe from the Coronavirus. Here are some ways to connect with your loved ones and advocate for them during this time.

## What precautions should senior living communities be taking to protect residents?

- Staff should wear personal protective equipment such as face masks and gloves
- Staff should wash their hands or using hand sanitizer before and after contact with a resident
- Communities should not allow outside visitors except those permitted in compassionate care situations, such as end of life, and only if they are not showing symptoms of COVID-19
- Communities should restrict visits of non-essential health care workers and long term care ombudsman
- They should suspend all community dining and group activities
- They should actively screen residents and staff for fever and other symptoms of COVID-19

## How can I connect with family and friends in senior living communities?

- Connect virtually through technology including video calls through FaceTime or Skype, text messages or email\*
- Call family/friends by phone to talk and keep them engaged
- Write to friends or family by letters or cards
- Send video messages through apps such as WhatsApp or MarcoPolo\*
- Drop off food, cards, or flowers (where permitted)
- Visit through a window or glass door (where permitted)

\*Ask staff what apps they prefer you use to communicate and when they are available to set this up. Facilities should have the staff and technology to help you connect virtually, at least occasionally.

**What should I do if I am concerned about the community's infection control practices or other issues?**

- Talk to the director of nursing or administrator about your concerns and ask what they will do to address them
- Contact the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program for assistance. The Ombudsman program advocates for residents and can help resolve concerns. Contact AgeGuide at (800) 528-2000 for more information

**While several changes and limitations have been temporarily put in place because of the COVID-19 crisis, residents still have the right to:**

- Receive the care and services needed to obtain their highest possible level of well-being
- Participate in developing and implementing a plan of care that reflects their personal and cultural preferences
- Make decisions about their care now and in the future, such as what treatment they might want related to COVID-19
- Be free from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and misappropriation of resident property
- Voice grievances without discrimination or retaliation, or the fear of it, and prompt efforts by the facility to resolve those grievances
- Not be discharged or transferred except for certain reasons, to appeal the decision, and have a safe and orderly discharge/transfer if the resident leaves the facility.

**Residents and families can promote good, safe care and keep up resident morale by:**

- Washing their hands (or asking staff to assist them) or using hand sanitizer and reminding other residents to do the same
- Practicing social distancing from other residents – staying 6 feet away
- Informing supervisors/administration if they observe staff who appear to be sick or not taking the steps listed above to prevent the spread of COVID-19
- Requesting that the administrator:
- Provide regular updates to residents about what the facility is doing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and/or care for any residents who are ill
- Share the results of the facility's self-assessment of its infection control practices
- Asking staff to schedule a regular time for residents to communicate with their family and to assist them if they need help
- Asking activities staff to find creative ways to continue regular activities even with residents in their rooms, such as playing bingo using call lights or conducting an exercise class via video chat

**Families can advocate for their loved ones by:**

- Finding out what steps the facility is taking to keep residents safe. Request that the administrator tell families how the facility performed on its self-assessment
- Asking how the facility will provide updates on their loved one and whom they should contact if they have questions
- Requesting that the facility set up a schedule for when they can connect with their loved one by phone, video, “window visiting,” or other method
- Asking the administrator to seek permission from the family of other residents to share their email addresses with each other. Families can create a group email and use it to communicate with other family members, bring questions and concerns to the facility or the Ombudsman program, or provide support to one another

Source: The National Consumer Voice for Long-Term Care

**Other Resources for Family Members in Long Term Care:**

[AARP: Coronavirus Nursing Home Questions](#)

[IDPH: Coronavirus Long Term Care Guidance](#)

[CDC: Nursing Homes Responding to COVID-19](#)

[IDPH: COVID-19 Long Term Care Facility Outbreaks](#)