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**COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE  
FOR PEOPLE AT RISK FOR SERIOUS ILLNESS  
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This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available.

This document is intended to be statewide guidance to help both individuals and caregivers inform their decision making. Decisions by individuals and caregivers should be determined by the specific circumstances in local jurisdictions.

### **Background**

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel virus that has been spreading worldwide. Community-acquired cases have now been confirmed in California. We are gaining more understanding of COVID-19's epidemiology, clinical course, immunogenicity, and other factors as time progresses, and the situation is changing daily. CDPH is in the process of monitoring COVID-19, conducting testing with local and federal partners, and providing guidance and resources to prevent, detect and respond to the occurrence of COVID-19 cases in California.

At this time, community transmission of COVID-19 has occurred in California. Individuals who are at risk for serious illness should prepare for possible impacts of COVID-19 and take precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as well as other infectious diseases, including influenza and gastroenteritis.

### **Illness Severity**

The complete clinical picture with regard to COVID-19 is not fully understood. Reported illnesses have ranged from mild to severe, including illness resulting in death. Older people, those with compromised immune systems, and people with certain underlying health conditions like heart disease, lung disease and diabetes, for example, seem to be at greater risk of serious illness.

### **High Risk Populations**

The current evidence, based on data from China and other parts of the world, indicates the following groups are at highest risk for COVID-19.



- Older adults
- Individuals with serious chronic medical conditions like:
  - Heart disease
  - Diabetes
  - Lung disease
- Individuals with compromised immune systems

### **Measures for High-Risk Individuals**

Individuals and caregivers can take steps now to slow the spread of respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19. CDPH recommends implementing the following steps:

- Review and update your personal emergency plan. A [Personal Emergency Plan](#) for people with access and functional needs is available on the California Health and Human Services Agency’s website.
- Avoid crowds, mass gatherings or large events, and public transit, and stay home as much as possible.
- Stay home when sick.
  - If you have an elevated temperature, remain at home until fever has been gone for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
  - Seek immediate medical care if symptoms become more severe, e.g., high fever or difficulty breathing.
- Clean and disinfect your home to remove germs: practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces (for example: tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks & cell phones).
  - See the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s guidance regarding the [prevention of disease in homes and residential communities](#).
- Use “respiratory etiquette.”
  - Cover cough with a tissue or sleeve. See [CDC’s Cover Your Cough page](#) for multilingual posters and flyers, posted at the bottom of webpage.
  - Provide adequate supplies within easy reach, including tissues and no-touch trash cans.

- Wash hands frequently for at least 20 seconds.
  - Encourage hand washing by caregivers, family, and friends.
  - Provide alcohol based hand sanitizers to supplement hand washing.
  - Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces.
  - Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Have supplies on hand
  - Contact your healthcare provider to ask about obtaining extra necessary medications to have on hand in case there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community and you need to stay home for a prolonged period of time.
  - If you cannot get extra medications, consider using mail-order for medications.
  - Be sure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms. Most people will be able to recover from COVID-19 at home.
- [Have a plan for if you get sick:](#)
  - Consult with your health care provider for more information about [monitoring your health for symptoms suggestive of COVID-19.](#)
  - Stay in touch with others by phone or email. You may need to ask for help from friends, family, neighbors, community health workers, etc. if you become sick.
  - Determine who can provide you with care if your caregiver gets sick.
- Watch for symptoms and emergency warning signs
  - Pay attention to potential COVID-19 symptoms including fever, cough and shortness of breath. If you develop symptoms, call your doctor or local public health department.
  - If you develop emergency warning signs for COVID-19, get medical attention immediately. In adults, emergency warning signs\* include:
    - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
    - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
    - New confusion or inability to arouse
    - Bluish lips or face

\*This list is not all inclusive. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptom that is severe or concerning.

### **Community Support for Older Adults**

- Community preparedness planning for COVID-19 should include older adults and people with disabilities, and the organizations that support them in their communities, to ensure their needs are taken into consideration.

- Many of these individuals live in the community, and many depend on services and supports provided in their homes or in the community to maintain their health and independence.
- Long-term care facilities should be vigilant to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19. Information for long-term care facilities can be found on the [CDPH website](#).

### **Family and Caregiver Support**

- Know what medications your loved one or client is taking and see if you can help them have extra on hand.
- Monitor food and other medical supplies (oxygen, incontinence, dialysis, wound care) needed and create a back-up plan.
- Stock up on non-perishable food items to have on hand in your home to minimize trips to stores.
- If a loved one lives in a care facility, monitor the situation, ask about the health of the other residents frequently and know the protocol if there is an outbreak.

### **Additional Resources**

- [California Department of Public Health Website](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Website](#)