What’s on the Horizon for Public Health?

How to protect Older Adults—from COVID 19

When President John F. Kennedy designated May as “Senior Citizens Month” in 1963, approximately 17 million Americans were age 65 or older. Today, that number is 45 million.

Older adults are our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, and neighbors. They are essential and valued members of our communities and an at-risk population whose unique needs—if unmet—can mean the difference between life and death in an emergency. This is the case with the COVID-19 outbreak.

A weakened immune system can make it harder for older adults to fight off infections. They are also more likely to have serious, underlying medical conditions that can make illness from COVID-19 more severe. These chronic conditions cause increased risk factors for older adults: heart, lung and liver diseases, diabetes and obesity.

There are some simple steps that older adults can take to reduce the risk of getting sick. These steps include staying home, having essential items delivered to them and limiting travel for essential errands. Frequent handwashing in addition to keeping surfaces clean and disinfected are also important.

As a community we can help protect older adults by being regularly involved in their lives. If we are prepared, we are then able to help our older friends, relatives and neighbors, during stressful times. Here are some suggestions that we as a community can do to prepare and protect them.

- Call, email, text, or video chat with loved ones often. They may be feeling lonely, anxious, or stressed, and will appreciate your listening ear. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults (and children).
- Check on (from a physical distance of at least 6 feet) family, friends, and neighbors to make sure they have enough supplies. Offer to go grocery shopping or to pick-up prescriptions for high risk family members, friends, and neighbors.
- Help to set up mail-order delivery of prescriptions and to schedule telehealth appointments.
- Share facts and help explain prevention tips.
- Schedule a video chat to demonstrate how to make and properly wear a cloth face covering. In fact, the older adults in your life may be able to teach you a thing or two if sewing is not a practical skill you have.
- COVID-19 is not the only thing endangering older adults. Scammers are taking advantage of fears surrounding COVID-19. Help the older adults in your life learn how to avoid misinformation, rumor, and scams.
- Older adults with dementia or other conditions that involve a full-time caregiver may not have the luxury of being able to physically distance themselves from their caregiver. Caregivers should routinely monitor their temperature and other signs of illness, on a daily basis and consider wearing a mask when caring for older adults.

Get more tips on how to protect older adults, children and yourself at www.CDC.gov . Information for this article is taken from the Centers for Disease Control website.

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