

HEMOCARE FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China. The virus spreads from person to person mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. A person can also get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. The virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading very easily and sustainably (going from person to person without stopping) between people. A person can be infectious before showing symptoms, which is why it is important to practice proper social distancing measures. To reduce the risk of infection, older adults should avoid leaving their homes unless it's critically necessary.

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting the global population in drastic ways and, in many countries; older people are facing the most serious threats and challenges. Although all age groups are at risk for contracting the COVID-19 virus, older people face a significant risk of developing severe illness due to physiological changes that come with ageing and existing underlying health conditions.

This pandemic has brought about unprecedented fear and uncertainty, especially among older adults. The elderly rely on social connection more than most and they need it now more than ever. The elderly and retired sometimes need a helping hand and they also often need to have people around them. With practicing a nation-wide lock down and social distancing vulnerable seniors could be feeling more alone than usual.

There are several reasons why the elderly are somewhat more vulnerable - they have more chronic conditions than younger people, their aging immune system makes it harder to fight off diseases, infections and viruses. Recoveries are usually slower and more complicated. Most of us are worried for our loved ones that are older and living far away from us. They might face anxiety because they live alone, are on a fixed income or pension, no longer drive and cannot take public transport, their routine health checkups are delayed. They could also have un-diagnosed or poorly managed depression.

Keywords: Covid-19, Elderly people, Homecare

TAKING CARE OF ELDERLY DURING COVID-19

When it comes to Coronavirus (COVID-19), elderly people, especially those at home are vulnerable to severe illness. Research says that adults 60 years and older and especially those with pre-existing medical conditions like hypertension (High BP), lung disease, diabetes, heart disease or cancer are prone to have severe, or even deadly, coronavirus infection compared to other age groups.

You may be worried if you are caring for an elderly loved one who is at home. Here are some guidelines you may need to know to keep elderly people at home safer, and what to do if they get infected with COVID-19.

Assessing the Risk for COVID-19 in Elderly

If you are an elderly person or you have a member in the family who is elderly, it is pertinent that you do a risk assessment for

CORONA infection. The following factors have to be kept in mind.

- AGE- 60-70, 70-80, above 80 years – risk increases with every decade
- Associated co-morbid conditions (pre-existing medical conditions) – Diabetes, High BP, Heart problems, Lung problems, Underlying Cancer, HIV or any other immunodeficient condition

Mitigating Risk of COVID-19 in Elderly

- Minimize the contact of elderly with other members of the family- Ensure only one person deals with them at a safe distance and that their food is also served with caution
- Avoid any visitors for the elderly
- Avoid any outdoor activity like walking, going to grocery etc
- Report any new symptom as soon as possible - do not wait for things to worsen

Handling New Symptoms or Problems

- Report all new symptoms immediately - elderly do not get high fever and may not get the classic signs as we see in young people. Hence, any change in behavior, symptoms or signs must be reported immediately
- Any cough, breathing difficulty, change in smell or taste function, loose motions, etc. are symptoms associated with COVID-19. They must be immediately reported to your home health doctor, via teleconsult

Ensuring Emotional Well-being

Elderly are likely to be overwhelmed with the entire COVID scenario and they need to be handled very sensitively in these times.

- Keep them active and positive- Yoga/Meditation can help
- Revisiting memories: watching old pictures, letters, videos can be a good way of keeping the elderly engaged during this time
- Using social media to video call with family /friends on a daily basis

CONCLUSION

Support for older people, their families and their caregivers is an essential part of the countries' comprehensive response to the pandemic. During times of isolation and quarantine, older people need safe access to nutritious food, basic supplies, money, medicine to support their physical health, and social care. Dissemination of accurate information is critical to ensuring that older people have clear messages and resources on how to stay physically and mentally healthy during the pandemic and what to do if they should fall ill.

In closing, I sum up 4 key messages underscoring that combating COVID-19 is a collective responsibility:

- While older people are at highest risk from COVID-19, all of us, at all ages, need to act in solidarity to prevent further community spread of the virus.
- It is crucial that we support all health and social care workers equally and give special attention to those who provide nursing and social care services for older people.
- Supporting and protecting older people living alone in the community is everyone's business.

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