COVID-19 Recommendations for Seniors

- Persons 65 years and older are at higher risk of developing severe illness and even dying from COVID-19. This risk increases with age.
- Persons who have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, lung disease or diabetes are also at higher risk for more serious illness from COVID-19.

How seniors, people with underlying medical conditions, and caregivers can protect themselves

- Take everyday precautions to prevent respiratory illness:
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, sneezing or having been in a public place.
  - Use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and face.
  - Avoid touching high-touch surfaces in public places. Use a tissue or your sleeve to cover your hand or finger if you must touch something.
  - Regularly clean and disinfect your home.
- Have supplies on hand including prescription and over-the-counter medications, other medical necessities, groceries, and other household items so you'll be prepared to stay at home for a prolonged period of time.
- Reducing exposure is especially important for people at higher risk of complications.
  - Stay home as much as possible. Consider ways of getting food brought to your house through family, social, or commercial networks.
  - If you do go out in public, stay at least 6 feet away from others and wear a cloth face covering. Be especially careful to avoid people who are sick.
  - Avoid crowds. Your risk of exposure may increase in crowded, closed-in setting with little air circulation.
- Have a plan in case you get sick:
  - Consult with your health care provider about monitoring your health for symptoms of COVID-19.
  - Stay in touch with others by phone or email. You may need to ask for help from family, friends, neighbors, community health workers or others.
- Identify who can provide you with care if your caregiver gets sick.

- Watch for symptoms and emergency warning signs:
  - Symptoms of COVID-19 are varied and include fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, loss of sense of taste or smell, sore throat, headache, and muscle pain. If you feel like you're developing symptoms, call your health care provider. Your health care provider can help determine if you should be tested.
  - Some emergency warning signs include difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or inability to rouse, bluish lips or face. This is not an all-inclusive list; immediately consult with your medical provider or seek emergency care for any symptom that is severe or concerning.
- What to do if you become sick:
  - Stay home except to seek medical care.
  - Call your health care provider before you seek care and let them know about your symptoms and any COVID-19 risk factors you have (e.g., travel, contact with a known case). *Your health care provider can discuss testing options with you.*
  - If you're not sick enough to be hospitalized, you may be able to recover at home. Follow CDC instructions for how to take care of yourself at home: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html.
  - Know when to get emergency help. Get medical attention immediately if you have any of the emergency warning signs (see above).
- More resources online at:
  - *CDC* - People at Risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19 www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html
  - *Washington Dept. of Health* - Guidance for Persons Who are at Higher Risk for Serious Illness www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020/HigherRiskforSeriousIllness.
  - *Administration for Community Living* – Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) acl.gov/COVID-19

How others can support older adults and anyone with underlying medical conditions

- Community preparedness planning efforts should include older adults, people with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, and the organizations and caregivers that support them.
- Family and caregivers:
  - Know what medications the individual is taking and see if you can help them have extra on hand.
  - Monitor food and other needed medical supplies (oxygen, dialysis, incontinence, wound care).
  - Stock up on non-perishable food items to have on hand to minimize trips to stores.
  - Monitor the situation nationally and in your community.

- Learn more about how to protect yourself and your community at
  www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/

What types of tests are being used to diagnose COVID-19?

There are many different tests being used to test for COVID-19. Two kinds of tests are available for COVID-19: *viral tests* and *antibody tests*.

- A viral test tells you if you have a current infection.
- An antibody test tells you if you had a previous infection

An antibody test may not be able to show if you have a current infection, because it can take 1-3 weeks after infection to make antibodies. We do not know yet if having antibodies to the virus can protect someone from getting infected with the virus again, or how long that protection might last.

There are several different viral tests used to identify the virus in samples from the respiratory system, such as from nasal or nasopharyngeal swabs. Some tests are conducted at the testing site you visit, and results are available to you within minutes. Other tests must be sent to a laboratory to analyze, a process that may take several days to get results. COVID-19 testing differs by location. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 and want to get tested, call your healthcare provider first. Your health care provider will know what tests are available in your location and whether or not you should be tested.

For more information on testing, please visit dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/COVID-19/testing.aspx

Medicare covers the lab tests for COVID-19. You pay no out-of-pocket costs. Medicare also covers all medically necessary hospitalizations. For more information on Medicare, please visit www.medicare.gov/medicare-coronavirus

Test results
- **If you test positive for COVID-19 by a viral test**, know what protective steps to take if you are sick or caring for someone.
  dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/SiteAssets/Pages/HumanCoV/Whattodo_suspectedorconfirmed.pdf
- **If you test negative for COVID-19 by a viral test**, you probably were not infected at the time your sample was collected. However, that does not mean you will not get sick. The test result only means that the virus that causes COVID-19 was not detected at the time of testing.

If you test positive or negative for COVID-19, no matter the type of test, you still should take preventive measures to protect yourself and others.