



Tips to support vulnerable people in the community

The outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) may cause additional challenges for older people who may already be vulnerable and particularly those who struggle with health conditions such as dementia, loneliness, and isolation. Whilst it is unlikely that dementia increases the risk of Covid-19, a number of risk factors mean that someone with dementia is more vulnerable at this time including:

- Forgetting to wash their hands
- Not recognising the importance of self-isolation and hand hygiene
- Risk of worsening cognitive health as a result of infection
- Becoming anxious or distressed by increased precautions and infection control measures

Tips on personal hygiene for the person with dementia:

- Written reminders can encourage people with dementia to wash their hands – visual images (such as hands or a sink) can often reinforce verbal messages. Signs may be effective if placed in the bathroom, and / or by entrances to the home.
- Lead by example – a visual demonstration of hand washing may be helpful to a person with dementia. Washing hands together – and regularly - may reinforce this behaviour.
- Hand sanitiser should be easily accessible throughout the home with gentle prompts to use this regularly.
- Tissues should also be readily available and sneeze etiquette encouraged – bins too!

Have a good support network:

- Make contact daily by phone to check in, have a chat and support your loved one in any way
- If you and your loved one have a computer, smart phone or tablet, consider using a video calling programme such as Skype or social media to stay in touch with people.
- Contact the Alzheimer National Helpline team on **1800 341 341**, via email at helpline@alzheimer.ie or via Live Chat at www.alzheimer.ie who are available to offer practical information and emotional support about dementia. We can also give you tips if you find it difficult to follow the HSE advice about

coronavirus. We cannot however offer personalised medical advice. But we will direct you towards reliable sources.

- Alone have launched a national support line for older people in collaboration with the HSE and the Department of Health. The helpline is open Monday-Friday 8am-8pm by calling **0818 222 024**. As the situation develops, Alone is looking at how it can work collaboratively to ensure older people will have access to food, medication, fuel, daily contact, and any other support that may be needed.

Offer practical help where necessary and appropriate:

- Ask them if they need any help with tasks such as shopping, posting letters, picking up prescriptions and medicines, or dog-walking.
- Shopping deliveries from supermarkets are also an option.
- Offer to accompany them or give them a lift to doctors' and hospital appointments if necessary.
- Older people often really appreciate any offer of help with basic household chores such as taking out the bins, help with laundry, gardening etc.
- Older, isolated people often need a hand cooking for themselves. Offer to take an extra plate of home-cooked dinners, or a frozen portion they can heat up or microwave over the coming days.
- Check that they have handwash and hand sanitiser available
- Try to make sure they have activities that they can engage in at home such as books, magazines, their favourite music, knitting, their favourite TV show or movie or looking through photo albums together.

Practical tips for planning ahead:

- Ask your pharmacist or doctor about filling prescriptions for a greater number of days for your loved one to reduce trips to the pharmacy.
- Talk to your home care providers. If you have carers coming into the home, ask about the precautions they are taking and whether there will be any disruption to the service you receive.
- Think ahead and make alternative plans for the person with dementia should essential services be cancelled in response to COVID-19.
- Think ahead and make alternative plans for care management if you / the primary caregiver should become sick.

- Changes in behaviour and confusion can be a sign of infection in someone living with dementia. Report any concerns to your GP or Public Health Nurse over the phone.

Stay informed: keep up to date on latest Covid-19 information on www.hse.ie