



Recommendations to prevent exposure to COVID-19 for Illinoisans living with or caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease and all other dementia

According to the 2020 Alzheimer's Association Facts and Figures Report, more than 230,000 people are living with Alzheimer's disease and nearly 590,000 people are providing unpaid care in Illinois. Most likely, dementia does not increase risk for COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the new coronavirus, just like dementia does not increase risk for flu. However, dementia-related behaviors, increased age and common health conditions that often accompany dementia may increase risk.

For example, people with Alzheimer's disease and all other dementia may forget to wash their hands or take other recommended precautions to prevent illness. In addition, diseases like COVID-19 and the flu may worsen cognitive impairment due to dementia.

Tips for Dementia Caregivers at Home

Caregivers of individuals living with Alzheimer's and all other dementia should follow guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and consider the following tips:

- For people living with dementia, increased confusion is often the first symptom of any illness. If a person living with dementia shows rapidly increased confusion, contact your health care provider for advice.
- People living with dementia may need extra and/or written reminders and support to remember important hygienic practices from one day to the next.
- Consider placing signs in the bathroom and elsewhere to remind people with dementia to wash their hands with soap for 20 seconds.
- Demonstrate thorough hand-washing.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can be a quick alternative to hand-washing if the person with dementia cannot get to a sink or wash his/her hands easily.
- Think ahead and make alternative plans for the person with dementia should adult day care, respite, etc. be modified or cancelled in response to COVID-19.
- Think ahead and make alternative plans for care management if the primary caregiver should become sick.

Tips for Caregivers of Individuals in Nursing Homes

The CDC has provided guidance to facilities on infection control and prevention of COVID-19 in nursing homes. This guidance is for the health and safety of residents. Precautions may vary based on local situations.

- Check with the facility regarding their procedures for managing COVID-19 risk. Ensure they have your emergency contact information and the information of another family member or friend as a backup.
- Do not visit your family member if you have any signs or symptoms of illness.
- Depending on the situation in your local area, facilities may limit or not allow visitors. This is to protect the residents but it can be difficult if you are unable to see your family member.
- If visitation is not allowed, ask the facility how you can have contact with your family member. Options include telephone calls, video chats or even emails to check in.
- If your family member is unable to engage in calls or video chats, ask the facility how you can keep in touch with facility staff in order to get updates.

