



## A Guideline to Care for Older Persons during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### ❖ Why special attention should be given to older persons?

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has been spreading throughout the country via respiratory droplets of mucus and saliva of the infected people. The transmission easily takes place via sneezing or talking between persons within the distance of 1.0-1.5 meters. Touching the droplets containing viral particles by hands is also another important route of transmission. The victim's epithelial cells such as eye, nose and mouth, are the portal for the virus entering the body leading to further infection especially in the lungs. Sometimes the virus spreader does not show any symptom. The high-risk groups are older person, immuno-compromised person and those who have comorbid conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, pulmonary disease, chronic renal failure, cardiovascular disease or cancer. The mortality rate in these particular groups increases significantly.

At the present time, the government has asked high-risk groups, including older persons, to stay at home as much as possible to reduce the chance of catching the virus. However, a large number of older persons needs help from relatives or carers, who must work

outside or do shopping in the crowded place and could possibly

transmit the virus to those under their care. Additionally, a long period of quarantine over many months may adversely affect the physical and psychological states of older persons giving rise to long-term dependency and more stress to the whole family both in short and long term. Therefore, a guideline to care for older person is needed to prevent such undesirable developments during COVID-19 pandemics.

### ❖ How can we prevent COVID-19 spreading to older persons?

Relatives, who are not the main carers, and acquaintance

- Those with high risk of spreading the virus, i.e., closed contact with confirmed COVID-19 patients, travelers from Bangkok and environs or regions with high prevalence of infection, must quarantine themselves at least for 14 days and must not be in close contact with older persons or children. (Children's immunity is not as good as adults' and they tend to stay closely with older people. At the same time they may not know the proper ways to protect themselves.)
- Close contact between older people and anyone with a fever, high temperature or any respiratory symptoms such as coughing, sore throat, running nose, shortness of breath or troubled breathing are strictly prohibited.



- Reduce the number of visits from persons outside the immediate family and substitute such engagement by telephone calls and online social media.
- During a visit to an older person, one must wear either sanitary or cloth mask all the time. Refrain from touching older person. Keep at least 2-meter distance in between.

#### *Main Carer and Older Person under Care*

- Designate the main carer. The most appropriate person is the one who can stay with older person as much as possible. However, the main carer may change from time to time, but such change should not be frequent. The main carer must not be the one in high-risk groups mentioned above.
- During the pandemics, both carer and older person should quarantine themselves at home as much as possible.
- Both carer and older person should keep their distance from children as they tend to stay closely with older people and may not know the proper ways to protect themselves from the infection.
- In case of necessity that the carer or older person has to go outside, choose the time when the visiting place is least crowded and avoid using public transportation. However, if visiting place is generally crowded, spend the shortest time and wear either sanitary or face mask all the time. Apply 70% alcohol hand sanitizer gel on both hands after touching things and before entering the home.
- Upon arriving home, the carer or older person should take a shower, shampoo and thoroughly clean or disinfect all the things brought from outside. Put on new clothes before approaching older person.
- If the older person has an appointment with a doctor
  1. For those who are in stable medical condition and have no need to follow laboratory testing: Make a phone call to ask for new appointment and arrange someone to pick up medications or refill the medicine at a pharmacy nearby.
  2. For those who are in unstable medical condition or in need of laboratory testing, consult your doctor or nurse for the safest way to visit. Be alert to put on surgical or cloth mask and cover the whole body with an appropriate sheet of cloth. Upon returning home, take a shower, shampoo and thoroughly clean or disinfect all the things brought from outside. Put on new clothes and have the used laundry washed immediately.
- Hand washing when coming back home, before food preparation or having a meal, after coughing or sneezing and using toilet with soap and water at least 20 seconds, then rinse with clean water. If using 70% alcohol hand sanitizer gel, allow it to evaporate for no less than 20 seconds.
- Avoid sharing food with others. Each person should have his/her own separate meal set. Avoid communal sharing of dishes or eating utensils.
- Each older person should have his own private room and personal belongings. If a separate room is not possible, a maximum distance should be kept between beds while allowing as much air circulation as possible in the room. An air-conditioned, unventilated room should be avoided.
- Clean commonly used surface regularly with disinfectants such as 70% alcohol, 70% alcohol hand sanitizer gel, sodium hypochlorite (i.e. bleach), chloroxylenol (ex. Dettol®) or hydrogen



peroxide. Apply disinfectant to lighting switch, door knob or door handle, railing, TV remote, telephone, floor, toilet seat, toilet flushing lever, and faucet. Take special care not to fall or slip over slippery area especially glossy wet floor.

- Recommended sanitizers and disinfectants :

Sodium Hypochlorite* (Bleach) Product Concentration	Recommended dosage	Water
2.54%	40 milliliters (or 2.8 tablespoons)	1 liter
5.70%	18 milliliters (or 1.2 tablespoons)	1 liter
	20 milliliters (or 1.3 tablespoons)	1 liter
6.00%	17 milliliters (or 1.1 tablespoons)	1 liter

\*Not suitable for metallic surfaces

Chloroxylenol (Dettol®) Product Concentration	Recommended dosage	Water
4.80%	25 milliliters (or 1.7 tablespoons)	1 liter

Hydrogen Peroxide* Product Concentration	Recommended dosage	Water
5.00%	110 milliliters (or 7.5 tablespoons)	1 liter
3.00%	200 milliliters (or 13.5 tablespoons)	1 liter

\*Not suitable for metallic or color-coated surfaces

❖ *How to observe when an older person gets infection?*

The infected older person may have symptoms difference from other age-group calling atypical symptoms. This includes being unwell without fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, lethargy, confusion, poor self-

care and delayed gastric emptying in case of tube feeding. Since the infected older people commonly deteriorate sharply compared to other age group, seeking immediate medical attention is highly recommended.

❖ *How to prevent physical and mental deteriorations during the quarantine period?*

Mnemonics\_ C O V I D : C – catnap, O – optimistic, V – vigor, I – intake, D - distancing

- **Catnap** : As an older person requires adequate rest, sleeping is important. No later than 9



pm, older person should be in bed to get a good and restful sleep for 7 – 9 hours a day.

- **Optimistic :**

1. Avoid information overload. Follow the news only 2 times a day, one in the morning and one in the evening to avoid excessive anxiety. As older person has been through many previous critical events and hardship, they can provide guidance to the younger generation.
2. Encourage them to voice their anxieties and fears with family members, children, relatives, and friends, relating to the current situation.
3. Engage in hobbies which they are good at or can enhance their self-confidence such as cooking, playing musical instrument, painting, reading books, watching favorite television program, gardening, etc. The most important thing is to seek out what they really like and find the activity that addresses it.
4. Create happiness for themselves and others in the family. Do things that bring joy and happiness. Talk about the good old days or good nostalgia by using photo album.
5. If stress and anxiety still persist, older person may try relaxing breathing technique, breathing exercise for muscle relaxation and self-administered massage. (For more information, please go to the link [www.thaimentalhealth.com](http://www.thaimentalhealth.com))
6. Avoid taking alcohol or narcotics
7. In case of requiring consultation, for example, excessive anxiety, anger, loss of concentration, negativity, obsession relating to the pandemics, fear of being infected,

insomnia, or increased dependence on drinking, smoking and taking narcotics, please contact Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health. Hotline 1323

- **Vigor :** Performing simple exercise such as walking or arm swing regularly, at least 5 days a week, 30-60 minutes each day, depending on individual physical status, is highly recommended.

- **Intake :** Meals should be freshly and hygienically prepared. Avoid sweet or salty dish while focusing on those with high protein to boost immunity. Have a well-balanced or diversified meal, covering the 5 essential groups of diet, to provide the body and brain with adequate nutrients. In addition, older person tends to have oral health problems. In order to reduce the need of dental consultation during the pandemics, the simple formula of “2 – 2 – 2 ” for oral health care is recommended. Tooth brushing at least 2 times a day for at least 2 minutes each time, and avoid eating after tooth brushing at least 2 hours.

- **Distancing :** During the pandemics, older persons and their carers should quarantine themselves at home as much as possible. The relatives or carers who need to go outside for necessary mission should not, upon returning home, stay close to older person. They should keep at least 2 meters and put on either sanitary or face mask all the time while talking. (See more details above)



For more information or consultation about the Covid-19 outbreak, please call the Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health, Hotline 1422.

**Link : Examples of activities and exercise program for older person**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1r4QDjkssc#action=share>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKDg8O3ovrw>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQ\\_fPO2Eh5s&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQ_fPO2Eh5s&feature=youtu.be)

Health, Department of Health, Ministry of Public Health, Division of Mental Health Promotion and Development, Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health, The Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association of Thailand. A Guideline to Care for Older Persons during the COVID-19 Pandemics. J Gerontol Geriatr Med. 2020;19(1): e1 (online first).

**Reference:**

1. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/infection-prevention-and-control>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/guidance-list.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc>
3. <https://www.nea.gov.sg/our-services/public-cleanliness/environmental-cleaning-guidelines/guidelines/interim-list-of-household-products-and-active-ingredients-for-disinfection-of-covid-19>
4. Guan WJ, Ni ZY, Hu Y, Liang WH, Ou CQ, He JX, et al. Clinical Characteristics of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in China. N Engl J Med. 2020 Feb 28. doi: 10.1056/NEJMoa2002032. [Epub ahead of print].

Cited this paper: Thai Society of Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine, Institute of Geriatric Medicine, Department of Medical Services, Ministry of Public Health, Bureau of Elderly