

# AFSCME

## Retirees Bulletin

### Coronavirus: What AFSCME Retirees Need to Know

As the coronavirus, also called COVID-19, outbreak begins to spread and is making more people in the United States seriously sick, AFSCME Retirees is sharing important updated information for older Americans about how to stay safe, healthy and informed. Because the coronavirus can be more dangerous to seniors and people with **serious** health conditions and/or **weaker** immune systems. To date, 8 out of 10 deaths reported in the United States from COVID-19 have been in adults ages 65 years and older. This fact sheet will provide basic information about how to better protect yourself.

#### What is the coronavirus?

The “Coronavirus disease 2019” (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that makes it harder to breathe. It can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 has spread across the globe and is causing so many people around the world to need hospital care that health care providers are overwhelmed.

#### How does the coronavirus spread?

The virus is thought to spread 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. But scientists are still learning how it spreads. The exploding number of people infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 shows that it can spread easily through a community unless serious steps are taken to reduce the spread.

#### Can a person with no symptoms spread the virus?

#### Can you get the virus from touching something?

**Yes**, it is possible for an infected person to have no symptoms of COVID-19 and still be able to spread the disease. It also may be possible that a person can 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, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

#### How can I help protect myself?

Seniors and other at higher risk can help protect themselves from respiratory illness with everyday preventive actions.

- **Stay home.**
- **Wash your hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- **Avoid touching** your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- **Avoid close contact** (6 feet, which is about two arm lengths) with people who are sick.
- **Clean and disinfect** frequently touched surfaces.
- **Avoid all cruise travel** and non-essential air travel.



**Practice respiratory hygiene.** Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene by covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of the used tissue immediately and then wash your hands.

If you have **fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical** care early by contacting your primary care provider to let them know your symptoms. Stay home if you feel unwell. Follow the directions of your local health authority.

### **Why are older adults at greater risk for the effects of the coronavirus?**

Older adults, which is generally defined as over 60, and people who have severe chronic medical conditions like heart, lung or kidney disease seem to be at higher risk for more serious COVID-19 illness. Early data suggest older people are twice as likely to have serious COVID-19 illness. This may be because:

- As people age, their immune systems change, making it harder for their body to fight off diseases and infection.
- Many older adults are also more likely to have underlying health conditions that make it harder to cope with and recover from illness.

If you are at increased risk for COVID-19 complications due to age or because you have a severe underlying medical condition, it is especially important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of exposure through social distancing.

### **How can I get ready for Coronavirus?**

Have supplies on hand:

- Contact your healthcare provider to ask about obtaining extra necessary medications to have on hand. If you cannot get extra medications, consider using mail-order for medications.
- Be sure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms.
- Have enough household items and groceries on hand so that you will be prepared to stay at home for a period of time. *(Note: call ahead to see if your grocery store currently has seniors only shopping hours or consider grocery delivery if available in your area.)*

### **What to do if you are sick with Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)**

Call ahead to a healthcare professional if you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or difficulty breathing, and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19, or if you live in or have recently traveled to an area with ongoing spread.

### **Where can I find more information about the coronavirus?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.gov) and the World Health Organization (www.who.int) have the most robust information available about the coronavirus.

AFSCME also has a website with information about the coronavirus outbreak: [afscme.org/covid-19](https://afscme.org/covid-19).

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