Coronavirus: What AFSCME Retirees Need to Know

As the coronavirus, also called COVID-19, begins to spread in the United States, AFSCME Retirees is sharing important information for older Americans about how to stay safe, healthy and informed. Because the coronavirus can be more dangerous to older adults [generally defined as age 60 and over] and people with serious health conditions and/or weaker immune systems, this fact sheet will provide basic information about how to better protect yourself1.

**What is the coronavirus?**
The “Coronavirus disease 2019” (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness [makes it harder to breath] that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China.

**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. **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.

**Why are older adults at greater risk for the effects of the coronavirus?**
Older adults [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.

---

1. Much of this information comes from the CDC and the WHO
How can retirees protect themselves?
People can help protect themselves from respiratory illness with everyday preventive actions.
  • **Avoid crowded places** to avoid close contact with people who are sick. This entails avoiding non-essential travel such as long plane trips, and especially avoiding embarking on cruise ships.
  • **Avoid touching** your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
  • **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.
If you have **fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care** early. Stay home if you feel unwell. Follow the directions of your local health authority.

How can I get ready for Coronavirus now?
  • Have supplies on hand
    o 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.
    o Be sure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms.
    o Have enough household items and groceries on hand so that you will be prepared to stay at home for a period of time.
  • If COVID-19 is spreading in your community, take extra measures to **put distance between yourself and other people**
    o **Avoid crowds as much as possible.** If you are in a crowded area take everyday precautions to keep space between you and others.
    o **Stay home as much as possible.** Consider ways of getting food brought to your house through family, social, or commercial networks

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](http://afscme.org/covid-19).

March 9, 2020