

# If you hunker down against coronavirus, don't stop reaching out, experts say

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As more communities deal with outbreaks of COVID-19, those at risk are being advised to stay home and stock up to protect themselves.

But experts say the need to hunker down does not mean people shouldn't reach out to help.

"When there's a time of anxiety, that is not a time to pull back from connectedness," said Dr. Franklin Watkins, associate professor in geriatric medicine at Wake Forest Baptist Health in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. "That's a time that we actually need to lean into social connectedness and lean into our family members and our friends and acquaintances."

The disease does call for precautions and for staying up to speed with the constantly evolving [statistics](#) and advice. That's particularly important for those in higher-risk groups: [older adults](#) or people who have underlying conditions such as [heart disease](#), diabetes, weak immune systems or lung disease.

Those precautions include keeping such people from places where they might be exposed to the [coronavirus](#)—such as a [grocery store](#) or a pharmacy full of [sick people](#), said Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, during an AARP teleconference on March 10.

"So, for example, we're recommending that you have supplies on hand, like medications for [blood pressure](#) and diabetes, and over-the-counter medications and [medical supplies](#), and have enough household items and groceries so that you can stay at home for a period of time," she said. "Because you may need to stay at home or at least closer to home for a couple weeks, especially if there is spread in your community."

Higher-risk people also should avoid close contact with people who are sick, Messonnier said. "If your grandchild is expected to come visit and they have a fever and a runny nose, it may not be the right time for them

to visit you."

Listen closely to [the CDC's advice](#), Watkins recommends. That does not mean you need to make a panicky run to the warehouse store to fill your SUV with toilet paper, he said. Focus on the basics.

And it does not mean abandoning loved ones or neighbors in isolation.

Watkins said if you can't physically visit someone, even a simple phone call can help. "By all means, stay connected."

Messonnier said, "If you're delivering food to somebody and you're leaving it at the door, and then they're opening the door, you are perfectly safe. There's no risk."

Watkins said if you're making an extended visit, it would be wise to keep a six-foot distance. "Would I be afraid to hug someone I love? Not necessarily," he said. "But I would try to limit close contact if I had a high-risk person that I was worried about."

Author Liz O'Donnell, founder of the caregiving website WorkingDaughter.com, said adults with older parents have been anxious about quarantines at long-term care facilities.

"I see some caregivers talking about, "Should I bring my parents home if they're living in a facility?" she said. "And I think one of the things we think about there is, would you be able to care for your parents if they were indeed to get sick while they were living with you?"

If a care facility goes into quarantine or prohibits visitors, family members should be comfortable asking questions, O'Donnell said. "How are the residents being socialized? Or how are they being isolated? Is my mother OK? Is my father getting his medication? Is he scared?"

At the same time, she said, people need to have "a high amount of compassion also for the workers."

For loved ones who live on their own, she suggests people ask the same sort of questions that might help them prepare for a blizzard. Do they have a cellphone or tablet computer they're comfortable using? Is it charged? Is there a neighbor you can call if you can't reach your parents?

Caregivers also can provide a calming presence—and help an at-risk person get accurate information, O'Donnell said. Don't minimize the risks, she said, but listen and address any fears they might have.

And then help them make sense of it: "'So Mom—here's what we know, here's what the CDC has said, here's what I'm doing for you. Don't worry about what Aunt Janet just sent.'"

Provided by American Heart Association

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