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COVID-19 AND OLDER ADULTS: A Q&A WITH “DR. DAN”



Bohdan Lebedowicz, MD, CMD – also known as “Dr. Dan” – a senior care and internal medicine physician with the Phelps Health Medical Group, answers some common questions about COVID-19 and older adults.

Q Who is at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19?

A The risk for severe illness from COVID-19 increases with your age, with the greatest risk among those age 85 or older. Additionally, people are at greater risk for serious illness from COVID-19 if they have any of the following medical conditions (this is not a complete list):

- Obesity (a body mass index, or BMI, over 30)
- Diabetes
- Liver disease
- Chronic kidney disease
- Immunocompromised (having a weakened immune system) from HIV or other causes

If you have any of the above or certain other underlying medical conditions, your ability to fight any type of infection, not just COVID-19, decreases.

Q Why are older adults or seniors more at risk for serious illness from COVID-19?

A With advanced age comes the increased chance of having more risk factors for becoming seriously ill from COVID-19. Additionally, as people age, their immune systems do not work as well when fighting diseases, so they are more likely to develop certain medical conditions.

Q What can older adults or seniors do to reduce their risk of getting COVID-19?

A To reduce their risk of getting COVID-19 or becoming seriously ill, older adults can follow several precautions, such as the following:

- Limit interaction with others
- Avoid activities where large crowds are gathering
- Wear a mask or face covering
- Practice social distancing
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol
- Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands

Q How can older adults in nursing homes or long-term care facilities stay socially connected with their families and loved ones – especially if in-person visits are not available?

A Residents can stay connected with their families through Zoom video calls or phone calls, or by talking to their families and friends through windows in their rooms at the facilities.

Q Why should children limit time with older adults, including relatives, and people with chronic medical conditions?

A Children might be transmitters of COVID-19, and the longer people are exposed, the more chance they have of getting a disease. Sometimes children are asymptomatic (show no symptoms) or they may not know they are sick and can spread germs.

Q What can older adults do if they begin experiencing feelings of anxiety or depression due to isolation?

A They should contact their primary care provider or seek a mental health provider. People with these types of feelings also can try exercising more, doing chores or reading books to keep busy.

Q How can older adults who do not live near their families ensure they will be taken care of if they become ill?

A They should develop care plans that may include advance directives and all of the information their physicians need to have. They should make sure they have a list of their current medications, emergency contacts and other important health information.

Q For older adults who have an annual checkup soon, should they be concerned about going to the hospital or doctor’s office?

A Going to the hospital or doctor’s office during a pandemic may give people feelings of uneasiness, but hospitals have precautions and safety measures in place to help limit the spread of infections. Hospitals like Phelps Health can accommodate patients under most circumstances. If patients do not feel comfortable going to appointments in-person, they can use Telehealth visits, where they can connect with their care provider using a smartphone or computer.

For more information about COVID-19 and older adults, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](https://www.cdc.gov).

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