

COVID – 19 and People Living with Dementia

It is important to know that dementia does not increase risk for COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the new coronavirus. However, altered behavior, increased age and other health conditions may increase risk.

People with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias may forget to wash their hands or the proper steps to wash their hands. They may need extra cues and/or written reminders and support to remember important hygienic practices from one day to the next.

- Consider placing signs in the bathroom to remind people with dementia to wash their hands with soap for 20 seconds (singing Happy Birthday twice).
- Demonstrate thorough handwashing.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can be a quick alternative to hand-washing if the person with dementia cannot get to a sink or wash his/her hands easily.
- Try to be as patient as you can.

Whether the person living with dementia lives at home or in a care community, it is important not to panic or alarm the person with dementia. They can pick up on your emotions, even if they don't understand the reasons behind them. If they have heard or read something in the news, offer reassurance that you are working on ways to keep them safe and healthy. There is no need to discuss the virus with the person with dementia unless they start a conversation.

Tips for Care Partners and People Living with Dementia

- Sanitize things that are touched a lot, such as remote controls, door & appliance handles, taps, etc.
- Ensure the person with dementia knows who and how to contact if they become unwell.
- If the person has to be in doors for a while, encourage them to do activities they enjoy. These activities could be reading, magazines, jigsaws, music, knitting, or watching a favorite tv show.
- Screen troubling messages that the person may hear or see. Watching the news or listening to the news may cause the person to worry.
- Keep in touch. If you cannot visit the person, stay in contact by phone, email or FaceTime or Skype. Encourage others to connect as well.
- Rest as much as possible. Looking after yourself is essential.
- Ask your pharmacist or doctor about filling prescriptions for a greater number of days to reduce trips to the pharmacy. Make sure you and the person you are taking care of have access to the medication they need.
- Make alternative plans for the person with dementia if their programs or plans are cancelled.
- Make alternative plans for care if the primary caregiver should become sick.
- Maintain your regular routines as much as possible.

Social isolation can be very difficult. During this time where social distancing is being widely recommended, consider reaching out to a neighbour, friend or relative, who may be isolated. Simple actions such as a phone call, or an offer to pick up a few groceries, can make a big difference.