

Phase Two Guidance

Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19): Guidance for In-Home Volunteering with Seniors

The ongoing public health emergency has severely restricted social engagement opportunities for vulnerable populations. Safely recruiting and deploying volunteers to engage with these populations is a critical need. This document is intended for individuals interested in in-home volunteering with senior members of the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. For additional information, see coronavirus.dc.gov/phasetwo.

General Information for Volunteers

- People aged 65 and older are at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19, as well as higher risk of death due to COVID-19. The highest risk of severe illness from COVID-19 is in people 85 and older. Eight out of every ten COVID-19 deaths have been in people age 65 and older. It is critical steps are taken to reduce their risk of becoming infected with COVID-19.
- For additional guidance for older adults and individuals with chronic health conditions, see coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance
- Any senior client or volunteer experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, or who was exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19 in the previous 14 days, must refrain from any in-home volunteering activities.
 - Symptoms of COVID-19 may include: fever (subjective or 100.4°F), chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, or otherwise feeling unwell.
 - It is important to be aware that symptoms of COVID-19 can be different in older adults. For example, normal body temperature can run lower and a temperature of as low as **100°F** can represent a fever in this age group. Older adults can also have mild early symptoms such as loss of appetite or unusual fatigue followed by rapid progression of illness.

Practice Everyday Prevention Measures

- **Stay at home if you are feeling sick** or if you were recently exposed to someone with COVID-19 and do not participate in the visit.
- **Practice social distancing.** Volunteers, clients and any other persons in the residence must keep at least 6 feet of distance between each other during the visit.
- Volunteers, clients and any other persons in the residence **must wear a mask or cloth face covering during the visit.**
 - This must be done even when 6 feet of distance is maintained.
 - A volunteer who is not able to wear a mask **must not** volunteer in-person with seniors.
 - For more information about mask wearing see *Masks and Cloth Face Coverings for the General Public* at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance
- Avoid physical contact (e.g., hugs, handshakes, high-fives) during the visit. Wave or verbally greet people instead.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your elbow (even if you are wearing a cloth face covering or a mask) and perform hand hygiene afterwards.
- Perform frequent hand hygiene (with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer).
 - Key times to perform hand hygiene include
 - At the beginning and end of the visit,
 - After using the toilet,
 - Before and after putting on, touching, or removing cloth face coverings,
 - Before and after work shifts and work breaks,

- Before and after services to each client,
- After handling client belongings, and
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

Precautions for In-Home Visits

Prior to the Visit

Volunteers and seniors must remain vigilant about monitoring themselves for fever and other possible symptoms of COVID-19 before any in-home visits.

- Before each visit, the volunteers and clients must screen themselves for symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or exposure to a person with COVID-19.
 - For **Screening Tool Guidance**, visit coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance.
 - If the volunteer or client has symptoms of COVID-19, has been exposed to COVID-19 in the last 14 days, or tests positive for COVID-19, in-home volunteer visits must be canceled.
 - Ensure the appropriate parties are notified if volunteering is being done through an agency.
- If in engaging in volunteering or visiting seniors, it is recommended to limit social activities as much as possible in the two-weeks prior to the visit, as this will decrease the risk of your exposure prior to interacting with someone who is more vulnerable.

During the Visit

- The volunteer and the senior must remain at least 6 feet apart at all times during the visit. Any other individuals in the senior's residence (household members or other visitors) must also remain at least 6 feet away from the volunteer.
- Volunteers must have a sufficient supply of hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes for use during the visit.
- Do not use shared towels after washing hands. The agency must supply volunteers with disposable towels for their use during visits. Consider asking seniors to make no-touch trash cans available for volunteers to use during visits.
- Upon arrival, the volunteer must use disinfectant wipes to clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are likely to be touched by the volunteer in the area the visit is taking place. The volunteer must repeat this process before departure (cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and objects that were touched by the volunteer during the visit).
 - Consider asking seniors to clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces in the area the visit will take place before the volunteer arrives.
- The volunteer must minimize touching surfaces or objects in the senior's home as much as possible.
- Conduct the visit outdoors if possible. If indoors, increase air circulation inside the home by opening doors and windows, and use a space large enough to ensure social distancing.
- Volunteers and seniors should avoid eating or drinking during the visit, particularly while indoors, so that masks can remain in place.
- For meal delivery services, utilize contactless deliveries to the greatest extent possible: Leave the delivery at the recipient's doorstep, then move to a distance greater than six feet away to verify receipt with the person receiving the delivery. For more information about safe food delivery see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/food-grocery-drivers.html.
- Keep a list of people who were at each visit and their contact information, in case someone becomes sick in the two weeks after each visit took place.

After the Visit

- In the two weeks after the visit, if the client, volunteer, or anyone at the visit develops a fever

≥ 100.4°F (for people under 65) or ≥100°F (for people over 65), or any other symptoms of COVID-19, they must inform each other, or the agency used, immediately.

- Seniors that may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 must contact their healthcare provider immediately.
- Information on options for COVID-19 testing in the District of Columbia are available at coronavirus.dc.gov/testing.
- Positive cases and their close contacts will also be contacted by the DC Health Contact Trace Force.

Virtual Engagement Opportunities

Any in-person interaction presents risk of the spread of COVID-19 and virtual means must be used when possible. The federal Administration for Community Living provides the following suggestions for virtually engaging seniors¹:

- Sharing encouraging messages and helpful resources via social networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram;
- Establishing or expanding virtual friendly-visiting programs and engaging staff and volunteers to make daily phone calls to older adults.
- Identifying virtual events (i.e. online concerts, museum tours, amusement park rides, aquarium visits) and sharing these events or website links using email.
- See more tools for virtual connections at acl.gov/COVID-19#RemoteToolsAnchor

In DC, the District's Department of Aging and Community Living (DACL) created a new "Call & Talk" program. Older adults can sign up to be paired with staff and volunteers for regular conversations, whether that is every day or weekly. DACL program grantees now call their participants regularly, Monday through Friday, to check in during the pandemic. For more information about this program, see dacl.dc.gov or contact DACL's call center at 202-724-5626.

The guidelines above will continue to be updated as the outbreak evolves. Please visit coronavirus.dc.gov regularly for the most current information.

¹ ACL COVID-19 Response · REOPENING GUIDELINES FOR SENIOR NUTRITION PROGRAMS available at <https://acl.gov/COVID-19>.