PUBLIC HEALTH INSIDER

OFFICIAL INSIGHTS FROM PUBLIC HEALTH – SEATTLE & KING COUNTY STAFF

WHEN GRANDPARENTS LIVE WITH YOU: HOW TO PROTECT OLDER ADULTS AT HOME FROM COVID-19

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Living with multiple generations in one home can be a wonderful way for children to bond with grandparents and for older adults to be an active part of family life. During the coronavirus pandemic, however, living in a multigenerational home requires some additional steps to prevent COVID-19. When there are multiple people in the household, there can be additional risk for older relatives who are more vulnerable to serious illness from COVID-19. This may be a particular worry for the essential workers who have to leave the home to provide the needed services for the community-like workers in healthcare, postal and delivery service, warehousing, food and grocery service, transportation, and sanitation.

If you have older adults living at home, or family members with medical conditions, take the following steps to protect them from possible infection.
If You Have to Go Outside the Home

If you need to leave your home to go to work or run errands, please take these steps to protect yourself and prevent carrying the virus into your home:

• Wear a cloth mask which covers your mouth and nose.
• Stay at least 6 feet away from others.
• Carry hand sanitizer or disinfecting wipes with you so that you can disinfect surfaces before you touch them or sanitize your hands if you don’t have access to running water.
• Travel alone, if possible. Try not to bring children with you. They are more likely to touch things in public and could carry those germs back to your home.

If You are an Essential Worker

Before leaving work, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. When returning home from work, change your clothes and shoes and wash your hands, especially if you’ve had any interaction with others. Children who go to childcare should take the same steps.
With children home from school, grandparents and older relatives may enjoy taking care of children in the home. Unfortunately, children can carry the coronavirus disease and infect others. Grandparents, older relatives or adults with health conditions should not be the main caretakers for children whenever possible.

**If you need childcare and are an essential worker living or working in King County, you can receive free childcare.**

- If you live or work in King County, outside Seattle, please call the Child Care Aware of Washington Family Center at 1-800-446-1114.

- If you live or work in City of Seattle, please fill out an interest form.

**Inside the Home**

If you are exposed to coronavirus, you might not know it. So even inside your home, it is important to maintain social distancing as best you can. **If possible, spend time in separate rooms from vulnerable family members.**

If you cannot separate, try to stay 6 feet away from vulnerable family members when in the same room. We know it may be difficult or impossible to follow these recommendations in your home—after all, young
children naturally want to cuddle and get close. Do the best that you can for your situation. It is most important to avoid close contact with vulnerable family members.

**Providing Care**

If you are the primary caregiver for an older adult in your home, and you help them with daily activities like bathing and getting dressed, take extra precaution. If possible, ask someone within your household who is not leaving the home for work to help them with these activities.

If you are the only one available to assist, please do the following:

- Wash your hands thoroughly before providing care.
- Wear a cloth face covering when providing care. Cloth face coverings should be worn by you and the person receiving care. You can use cloth masks, bandannas, or a piece of cloth tied snugly over the nose and mouth.
- If you use towels and wash cloths, make sure to use clean ones each time.

**Preparing and Sharing Meals**

When you cook meals:

- Wash your hands before, during, and after preparing food.
- Wash utensils and surfaces after each use.
- Cook foods to a high enough temperature to kill germs that can make you sick or give you food poisoning.

During meals, try to maintain 6 feet of distance between family members. If your table or dining space does not allow for this distancing, consider eating at different times, eating in separate rooms, or in a larger space that allows everyone to maintain six feet of distance.

To protect vulnerable family members:
• Every family member should wash their hands before and after eating.
• Wash serving utensils and dishes before vulnerable family members serve themselves foods.
• If prayer is part of your family’s mealtime routine, pray without holding hands.

**Cleaning the Home**

Clean and disinfect surfaces that your family frequently touches. Use a household cleaner to disinfect countertops, door knobs, handles and buttons in the kitchen, TV remotes, sink faucets, and anything else that people touch often. Do this more than once a day, if possible.

![Image of people cleaning](image)

**How to wash laundry**

When doing laundry, take these steps to protect your family:

• Use the warmest temperature setting and dry items completely. If hand washing, use the warmest temperature possible and soak clothes for 20-30 minutes before rinsing.
• If you use a laundromat or shared laundry room, try to go at times when it’s least crowded. Stay at least six feet away from others.
• Wash your hands after handling dirty laundry.
Practice Healthy Habits

Every family member should practice healthy habits so they don’t get sick and expose vulnerable members of the household.

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or a sleeve.

Enjoy Time Together

Despite the challenges of this outbreak, living with older family members has so many benefits, including keeping strong bonds across generations. The daily social interaction also can lift the mental health of everyone in the home. Finding safe ways to continue to interact and demonstrate your affection for one another is important. Keep those conversations, stories and laughter coming, just from across the room! Thank you for all you do to protect and care for your family members who are in the high risk groups for COVID-19.