

COVID-19 UPDATE

OLDER PERSONS and the COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A corona virus (COVID-19) that first occurred in Wuhan, China, has rapidly spread through the United States. This virus group causes the common cold, but it has also been related to epidemic lung diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). The COVID-19 virus is especially severe in older individuals with multiple diseases, with about 15% of affected individuals over age 80 dying. For this reason, we suggest that all older persons are tested with the FRAIL screen. If results from the FRAIL scale are positive, the older adult will require hospitalization. A copy of the FRAIL scale is included here.

These findings are typical of COVID-19. Eventually, the lungs fail to function and the patient needs to be artificially ventilated. The person can also go into shock, and experience heart disease, liver dysfunction, and kidney failure.

COVID-19 is spread by droplet infection and through the air. Viruses can live on surfaces such as plastic for up to 72 hours. Persons should use alcohol to sanitize these surfaces. We should remember that pumping gas and ATM machines can be a source; so wipe them before using.

If you develop a fever, new cough, or upper respiratory infections, you need to be tested for the virus. This

- Socially distance
- Wash hands for as long as it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” (20 seconds)
- Use alcohol wipes on surfaces
- Isolate as much as possible
- Develop a plan in the event symptoms appear, and have an advance directive
- Remember young persons often have no symptoms and they are the persons most likely to infect others
- Stay connected to family, friends, and others through the phone, videoconferencing, and social media

Some drugs such as chloroquine and Remdesivir are showing some promise to treat people with severe disease. If you are taking ACE inhibitors, *e.g.*, lisinopril, or ibuprofen or other NSAIDs, ask your doctor if you should take them. Tylenol® is the better option for fever and pain.

For many older persons, the stress of this time and loneliness due to social isolation will be a major aggravating and impactful factor. It is essential that family and neighbors support older persons making certain they have food but also are communicated with regularly by telephone, FaceTime, or Skype. It is important not to get stressed over this pandemic, as we have the tools to get over it.

This is a DIFFICULT TIME for all of us, but it will get better, and we all need to keep a positive attitude at this time.

The Simple “FRAIL” Questionnaire Screening Tool

Fatigue: Are you fatigued?

Resistance: Cannot walk up one flight of stairs?

Aerobic: Cannot walk one block?

Illnesses: Do you have more than 5 illnesses?

Loss of weight: Have you lost more than 5% of your weight in the last 6 months?

Scoring: 3 or greater = frailty; 1 or 2 = prefrail

Morley JE, Vellas B, Abellan van Kan G, et al. *J Am Med Dir Assoc* 2013;14:392-397.

COVID-19 virus typically begins as a cough and a runny nose. Many patients have a fever, but in some older persons, it may start without a fever. It also can present with diarrhea. It then can cause severe breathlessness as it produces a pneumonia. This pneumonia has patches (ground glass opacities) in the lungs on X-Ray or CT scan.

is done with a nasal swab which is then sent for a PCR assay to identify viral mRNA. A quicker immunoassay has been developed where you can get the answer within 15 minutes.

The first vaccine tests have just begun but it is expected a vaccine will be found to prevent the disease. In the meanwhile, older persons must:

