



# National Indian Health Board NATIONAL TRIBAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

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## Caring for Elders During COVID-19

Because elders are at higher risk of developing a serious COVID-related illness, those who love and care for elders should take extra steps to protect their safety and keep them healthy.

### What can you do to support Elders?

- **Know what medications your loved one is taking** and see if you can help them have extra on hand.
- **Monitor food and other medical supplies** (for example, hearing aid batteries, oxygen, incontinence, dialysis, wound care) needed and create a back-up plan.
- **Stock up on non-perishable food items** in your home to minimize trips to stores. Consider asking friends or family for help to minimize an elder's need to go out.
- **If the elder needs to leave the home for any reason**, make sure they have a mask or face covering. Try to limit visits to higher risk areas like stores or doctor's offices.
- **Ask questions and stay informed.** If you care for a loved one living in a care facility, monitor the situation, ask about the health of the other residents frequently and know the protocol if there is an outbreak.
- **Practice good home hygiene.** Wash your hands frequently and keep high-use items like phones, door handles, and remotes clean.
- **Keep track of what things your loved one uses regularly** and try to limit others touching those. Let the elder use their own bathroom and kitchen utensils if possible. Otherwise, be sure to clean their space regularly.
- **Keep an eye out for if your elder shows signs of anxiety, stress, or a more serious mental health concern.** Call a mental health provider or primary care provider if there is concern.
- **Take care of yourself too!** Maintaining your emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual health is an important way you can help your elder and family stay strong.

Be sure to check with your Tribe to see what elder services are available or may have changed due to the COVID response. For example, several Tribes have set up food drives or delivery and some businesses have special hours for elders so they can avoid crowded stores. You can find additional resources here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-home-care.html>.

### Why are Elders at higher risk?

Tribal communities are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 because of unique characteristics of health that impact Tribal members.

**Older people are more likely to have serious COVID-19 illness if they contract the disease.** This may be because immune systems change with age, making it harder to fight off diseases and infection.

Older adults also are more likely to have underlying health conditions, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, that make it harder to cope with and recover from illness.