



Caring for a person at the end of life at home during COVID-19

The purpose of this factsheet is to outline some of the changes to caring for someone at the end of life at home that may be a result of COVID-19.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19, otherwise known as coronavirus, is a new type of virus which can cause a variety of symptoms including fever and respiratory symptoms. In some people there are no symptoms, while others get very severe symptoms and require hospitalisation.

The virus appears to be more severe for older people who may already be in poor health. For information on COVID-19, please visit the [Department of Health website](#).

Social distancing and the changing role of health care professionals

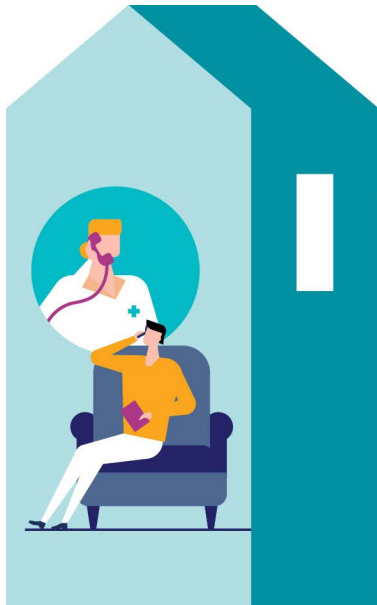
To avoid the virus from spreading, there are new social distancing rules which mean that health care professionals are not as readily available to visit the person you are caring for in their home.

This means there will be more reliance on telehealth and you may also need to do more of the 'hands on' caring. The health care team, including GPs, palliative care services, district nursing services, and allied health services, are conducting more consultations by telephone (or video calls).



Questions you may want to consider asking the health care team include:

- How will care be provided to my partner, relative or friend during this time?
- Who do I contact if my partner, relative or friend's symptoms change or get worse?
- What is the best way for me to get help from the health care team in an emergency?
- As death becomes more imminent, will the health care team come and help in the home?
- If I am not coping, who should I contact?



How will COVID-19 change the way you care at home?

The most important thing to remember is to clean your hands frequently, particularly on entry to the house, before food preparation, after using the toilet, and before and after handling the person you are caring for— either with soap and water or with an alcohol-based sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

If a service or visitor comes into your home, strict hygiene and social distancing are important. This means that they wash their hands on entry to the house, limit physical contact (unless absolutely essential), and adhere to social distancing rules.

The health department have good resources on protecting yourself and others from COVID-19.

It is still okay to have a friend or family member come into the house to assist you to provide essential care, but please check the guidelines in your state or territory as this varies.

CarerHelp has a number of very useful resources for caring for a person with an advanced disease. You may like to read the following information modules and factsheets:

- [Symptom management module](#)
- [Common emotions at the end of their life](#)
- [Emotional care of the seriously ill person](#)
- [Helplines for carers](#)





Other ways that family and friends can help is to:

- Do your shopping and drop it at the door.
- Go to the pharmacy and get scripts filled.
- Drop in 'care packages' of home cooked meals or magazines, puzzles, books, or games.
- Call you and the person you are caring for to offer emotional support.
- Help with gardening and other outside maintenance.



What if one of us develop COVID-19 symptoms?

If you think the person you are caring for may have COVID-19 please ring your local GP clinic to inform them – they will advise you as to what to do next. There is also useful advice available at [Healthdirect](#).

Being prepared in case you become unwell

In case you develop COVID-19 or become unwell due to other reasons, it will be important that the person you are caring for can continue to be cared for with the help of someone else. This may involve having a backup carer who can take over your role.

In order to be prepared in case you do become unwell, we recommend that you start this conversation as soon as possible with the backup carer.

It is also important that you write down clear instructions about medications, contact names and numbers of the health care team, food requirements, personal care, end of life choices, and other important care matters.



You may find our CarerHelp resources helpful:

- [Emergency contact list](#)
- [Medication template](#)
- [What to do in an emergency](#)
- [Managing communications](#)
- [Visitor/Careworker timetable](#)

It might also be a good time to have a discussion with the person you are caring for about the possibility of them needing to be cared for in a different place (such as hospital or an aged care facility) if you became unwell or are unable to continue caring at home. You may find the CarerHelp [Is caring at home an option](#) tool useful.

Support for caring for the dying person at home

Even though telehealth is the main source of support, GPs and other health services are still providing face to face services as needed. Palliative care teams and district nursing services will also come into the home and provide necessary care for your family member when they are dying (last days of life). This may involve providing medications and symptom relief to the dying person.

CarerHelp has a number of resources that may assist you:

- [How to tell if a person is dying](#)
- [Practical tips for caring as death approaches](#)
- [Caring for yourself at the bedside](#)
- [Recognising dying](#)

If you are struggling seek help from your GP, friends, and family. The [CarerHelp factsheet Helplines for carers](#) will provide you with a telephone service that can provide the support you need at this time.

For further information on COVID-19 for information for carers, please visit the [Healthdirect website](#).

[CareSearch](#) also has trustworthy information for carers on palliative care during COVID-19.

Caring for yourself during this time

Social distancing and the restrictions of visitors to the home makes it harder to get the social support that carers need. But it is important to care for yourself at this time. Ways that you might be able to do that are:



Telephone and video calls with family and friends

Make sure your physical health is well managed by keeping your routine medical appointments. This could be done via telehealth.



Make a regular time to exercise – you are currently allowed to exercise with one other person – this may be a good way to maintain your social support.

Find some time at home to do the things you enjoy – this may be reading, knitting, cooking, or playing video games.



CarerHelp is here when you need it.
www.carerhelp.com.au