



FACT SHEET

NEW CORONAVIRUS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

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The new coronavirus can be dangerous for the elderly and for adults with certain underlying conditions – they can get severely ill. Are you looking after vulnerable people or living with them in the same household? In this fact sheet you will find information you should be aware of as a family caregiver and which may provide you with answers to important questions.

Protect yourself and the person you are caring for. Your job is particularly important at this time. Here you will find information about what to do on a day-to-day basis or when symptoms of the disease appear. You should also prepare for a situation where you yourself become ill by drawing up a list of information – preferably with the person you're caring for – that will be helpful for someone who has to take your place as carer.

People with one of the following underlying conditions are particularly vulnerable:

- high blood pressure
- cardiovascular disease
- diabetes
- chronic pulmonary and respiratory diseases
- cancer
- conditions and therapies that weaken the immune system
- obesity class II (BMI \geq 35 kg/m²)
- liver cirrhosis
- chronic kidney disease

What should you make sure to do on a day-to-day basis if you live in the same household as the person you are caring for?

You can leave your home as long as you strictly follow the [hygiene and social distancing rules](#).

Avoid places frequented by large numbers of people (e.g. railway stations, public transport) and peak times (e.g. shopping on Saturdays, commuting).

Meet as few people as possible. If you do meet other people, stay at least 1.5 metres away from them, and wear a mask if you're unable to keep your distance.

Air the entire flat three to five times a day for 5 to 10 minutes each.

Accept help from people around you. Let those around you know what you need. Don't be afraid to get help and support.

You can call the **Pro Senectute hotline** (058 591 15 15) or ask the cantonal offices of the Swiss Red Cross or Caritas for more information. At www.infosenior.ch, www.hilf-jetzt.ch via the Five-up app you will find details of **further support in your area**. If necessary, get a younger person who is familiar with new media to arrange help.

If you live with or are looking after a person with **dementia**, you can get advice from the national **Alzheimer helpline** (058 058 80 00) or at www.alzheimer-schweiz.ch.

Get others to do your shopping for you. Ask people around you for help with this or use one of the local sources of support mentioned above. Arrange payment on an individual basis in advance. For example, you could keep a special coronavirus account, use electronic payment or postpone payment till later.

You can also order **food and meals online for home delivery**. Here too you can use the local sources of support mentioned above or the food retailers' online stores.

Keep your distance: It's important to stay at least 1.5 metres away from other people outside your own household. If friends or neighbours do the shopping for you, they should leave it at your door. Wear a mask if you're unable to keep your distance.

Talk to other people: Let your family, friends and acquaintances know how you are doing. Maintain social contact (keep in touch with people) by phone or digital media. There is nothing wrong with having a chat through the window if you keep the necessary distance.

If you are worried or **scared** and need to talk to someone, call 143 (Dargebotene Hand/La main tendue/Telefono Amico Ticino e Grigioni Italiano) or find out more on the internet at www.dureschnufe.ch

If you are getting **home nursing support**, you can continue to do so. Staff at home nursing (Spitex) services, Pro Senectute and other specialist organisations are trained in the necessary rules of hygiene.

If you or the person you're caring for needs to go to the doctor, phone them first. If you're asked to go to the surgery (medical practice) in person, go by car, bike or on foot. If that's not possible, take a taxi and wear a mask. Call 144 if it's an emergency.

When deciding on whether to ask other people such as **cleaning personnel or tradespeople** for help, you should weigh up what's most important: the service which you may urgently need, or the risk that you might get infected by the person providing it. Whatever the case: stay at least 1.5 metres away from other people, and wear a mask if you're unable to keep your distance.

What should you do if you do not live in the same household as the person you are caring for?

Basically, you can continue to care for them, as long as you follow the [hygiene and social distancing rules](#) and keep your contact to a minimum to reduce the risk of spreading the new coronavirus.

If you go shopping for the person you're caring for, should leave the shopping at their door and stay at least 1.5 metres away from them. It's important to wash your hands thoroughly beforehand. There's nothing preventing you from having a chat through the window or on the stairs if you keep the necessary distance. Wear a mask if you're unable to keep your distance.

If the person you're caring for needs to go to the doctor, you should call a taxi for them and wear a mask. Call 144 if it's an emergency.

Wear a mask when using public transport.

If you're elderly yourself or have an underlying (pre-existing) condition, you count as a vulnerable person (someone at greater risk). You can leave your home as long as you strictly follow the [hygiene and social distancing rules](#). Avoid places frequented by large numbers of people (e.g. railway stations, public transport) and peak times (e.g. shopping on Saturdays, commuting).

Meet as few people as possible. If you do meet other people, stay at least 1.5 metres away from them, and wear a mask if you're unable to keep your distance.

Accept help for you and the person you are caring for from the people around you. Or look, for example at www.hilf-jetzt.ch, for someone who lives close to the person needing care who can drop by regularly (while keeping to the [hygiene and social distancing rules](#)).

You can also give a **home nursing (Spitex) organisation** the job of providing the necessary care and nursing. Nursing care can be claimed on mandatory basic health insurance.

If the person receiving care is already receiving **home nursing support**, they can continue to do so. Home nursing (Spitex) services have qualified staff who are trained in the necessary rules of hygiene.

Keep in touch **by phone or digital media** with the person you're caring for.

What should you do if symptoms appear?

Symptoms of the new coronavirus disease are:

- Symptoms of acute respiratory disease (sore throat, coughing [in most cases a dry cough], shortness of breath, chest pain)
- Fever
- Sudden loss of sense of smell and/or taste

The following symptoms are also possible:

- Headache
- General weakness, feeling unwell
- Muscle ache
- Sniffles
- Gastrointestinal symptoms (nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach ache)
- Skin rash

In older people, acute confusion or a deteriorating general condition without any other aetiology can also be a symptom of COVID-19. Symptoms of illness can vary in severity and can even be mild. If the person you're caring for feels ill or experiences some symptoms, it is possible that they have contracted the new coronavirus.

An infection with the new coronavirus can be dangerous for particularly vulnerable individuals, because the course of the disease can be severe for them.

If you are caring for a particularly vulnerable person who has severe symptoms or if the symptoms are worrying, immediately contact the treating physician – even at the weekend – to discuss the steps to be taken. Tell the physician that you're calling in connection with the new coronavirus and that she or he is particularly vulnerable. Describe the symptoms. The same procedure applies for you if you are particularly vulnerable yourself and have severe symptoms.

If the person you're caring for or you yourself have only mild symptoms, you should:

- 1) **Reduce contacts: Stay at home** and avoid all contacts to other people.
- 2) **Testing recommendation:** Take the coronavirus check and answer all the questions as best you can. At the end, you will be given a recommendation by the FOPH on what to do next. If you are advised to get yourself or the other person tested, you will be given instructions on how to proceed. You can also call your doctor to discuss the next steps.
- 3) **Testing:** Get yourself tested if the coronavirus check or your doctor recommends you do so.
- 4) **Until the test results come back:** Stay at home and follow the instructions on isolation. All contacts to other people should be avoided until you have the test result.

You can find all further information on the [FOPH website](http://www.bag.admin.ch/isolation-and-quarantine) at www.bag.admin.ch/isolation-and-quarantine

How do I prepare in case I, as a family caregiver, become ill myself?

You should have a “**plan B**” for the event that you become sick:

Are there people around you who could step in if you get sick? Who could take care of what tasks?

Prepare a list of helpful **information for someone taking your place** so that everything is quickly at hand if required. Ideally, you should have the person you are caring for draw up the list, or discuss it with them if possible.

Points you could cover in the list:

- What support does the person you are caring for require?
- Which members of their family should be contacted?
- What can the person receiving care do for themselves?
- What points should be paid attention to for the good of the person receiving care?
- If applicable, what medication should they be taking and when?
Where is the medication available?
- Names and phone numbers of the most important doctors and other professionals or specialists.
- Has the person receiving care already drawn up an advanced healthcare directive (living will) setting down important arrangements?

If you are drawing up a list of information for someone taking your place as caregiver, you might want to also use the [template](#) from Pro Aidants.

Talk to others about what you are going through – your thoughts and feelings – to your family, friends and acquaintances or also to professionals.

Further information

You will find detailed information on the new coronavirus on the website of the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH): <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov.html> and www.foph-coronavirus.ch.

You can also call the Coronavirus Infoline on +41 58 463 00 00 for information, from 6 AM to 11 PM daily.