



Keeping Florida Seniors Safe, Healthy, and Un-Scammed During COVID-19

Undeniably, the novel coronavirus presents a threat to senior citizens. And in a state like Florida, those concerns only amplify. While the population of people aged 65 and above is projected to more than double (from 6.5 million to 14.4 million) by 2040, the senior population makes up a hefty portion of the Sunshine State. According to the state's Department of Elder Affairs, roughly 19.9% of Florida's population is 65 years or older.

As a result, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has stated that the health and safety of this vulnerable demographic is his top priority during the pandemic. The most recent figures show that 83% of those who have died in Florida from COVID-19 were over the age of 65, with one in four individuals aged 85 or older with confirmed cases succumbing to the disease. At least 43% of deaths across the state are related to long-term care facilities.

But even when seniors age in place, coronavirus transmission should be a major concern. Although the state has already begun to reopen, an increase in testing measures resulted in the state's new single-day record for confirmed COVID-19 cases — and at least nine straight days of at least 1,000 Floridians testing positive for the virus. Certainly, this indicates greater accessibility to testing — but it's too soon to tell whether the surge in confirmations will translate to a spike in hospitalizations or deaths.

In the interim, it's essential for seniors (and their caregivers) to play it safe. Here are a few tips that will keep older Floridians healthy and safe — from all different kinds of harm — as the pandemic continues.

Follow All Recommended Precautions

Although you might assume this goes without saying, many Americans are interpreting the reopening of businesses to mean that the threat of the coronavirus no longer exists. It's essential that seniors continue to practice all recommended measures pertaining to hand-washing, cleaning of surfaces, mask-wearing, social distancing, and staying home whenever possible. Reducing the potential for exposure is truly one of the best ways to stay safe. So while seniors might be eager to eat out at restaurants or to visit with friends and family, health guidelines must continue to be followed — and additional caution must be observed.

Take Advantage of Special Shopping Options

Many stores have designated hours for senior shoppers, which usually take place earlier in the day and will minimize the potential for contact with others. Some retailers have also introduced drive-through ordering or order delivery options, which can further reduce the risk for many seniors. If you're delivering essential items to an older loved one, it's best to leave your delivery at the door to reduce contact. This is not the time for older people to take a trip to the store for fun; unless a senior absolutely has to go out, it's best not to risk it.

Stay Active and Eat Healthy

Although junk food can be comforting in times of crisis, it's best for people of all ages to watch what they eat and get as many nutrients as possible through their diets. Keep in mind that if our society reduces our meat consumption between 2016 and 2050, we could reduce health care costs and climate change costs by \$31 trillion. Reducing the amount of meat consumed can help seniors manage certain health conditions, especially because a veggie-rich diet can boost immunity. And because many meat-packing plants across the nation have become hotspots for COVID-19, many Americans are understandably concerned about lowering the spread through dietary adjustments.

Of course, increased physical activity is important, as well. Not only can it boost your energy and overall immune system, but it can reduce stress and feelings of depression — which is incredibly important for seniors who feel isolated as a result of stay-at-home orders. Even taking a walk around the neighborhood or retrieving the mail can help, as can lowering the amount of time you spend sitting down.

Use Telemedicine When Possible

Many seniors are frequent visitors to their physicians' and specialists' offices. Since physical therapy has been shown to reduce patient treatment costs by 72%, it's not surprising that many older patients are reluctant to miss these appointments. But even if these offices are open during this time, it's risky to go in unless it's a true emergency. If you can, it's best to take advantage of telemedicine, which allows patients to contact their doctors via phone or video conference to receive diagnoses, hear about recommended treatments, or even have prescriptions filled. If you're caring for a non-tech-savvy senior, help them get set up for telemedicine and figure out whether their insurance policy covers it.

Steer Clear of Scams

Physical and mental health are vital for seniors during this time. But fiscal health is also a concern, even for those who are no longer in the workforce. Unfortunately, scammers are notorious for targeting senior citizens — and in the wake of COVID-19, many criminals are altering their approach to take advantage of pandemic panic. Florida officials have already issued warnings that scammers are reportedly targeting seniors living in the Sunshine State with fake COVID-19 grants. Other fraudsters have tried to dupe senior citizens with promises of coronavirus vaccines or door-to-door testing. There have also been reports that older adults have been contacted via phone by supposed Medicare representatives; these fake reps say that they'll send seniors free masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer if they provide their Social Security or Medicare identification numbers. While it's not clear how many residents have fallen for these scams, it's important that caregivers and seniors become aware of trends in criminal activity and be suspicious of any solicitation related to COVID-19.

Although shelter-in-place orders have been lifted in many states, the danger isn't over yet. In order for seniors to stay safe in Florida and throughout the nation, it's crucial that these tips be followed and that those in vulnerable demographics be extremely careful about their potential for exposure moving forward.