

S O C I A L D I S T A N C I N G

***INSPIRATION* COPD NEWSLETTER**

Respiratory Health Association's newsletter for people living with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), their families, and caregivers

SPECIAL EDITION:

We hope this special edition of *Inspiration* finds you safe and healthy, and coping with the coronavirus pandemic. As we did in our last special issue, we are writing to share information and resources to keep you safe in managing your COPD or the COPD of a loved one. Importantly, in this issue we highlight what to expect from the lifting of stay-at-home orders and the special challenges those actions pose for people living with COPD. We hope to be able to see you soon, once we are all on the "other side" of the coronavirus pandemic.

People with underlying health conditions, including COPD, and people ages 60 years and older are at no greater risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 than others; however they could face more serious complications if they become infected.

THE STAY-AT-HOME ORDER IS LIFTED. NOW WHAT?

The lifting of stay-at-home orders, while a positive sign, presents special risks for people living with chronic lung disease. As people become more mobile and begin mixing with family members and friends who are no longer practicing social distancing, people living with COPD need to make sure they stay healthy and avoid exposure to the novel coronavirus.

People with chronic lung disease and other vulnerable conditions and members of their households should still keep in mind ways to remain safe and healthy when stay-at-home orders are lifted. Here are some important tips for continuing to protect yourself:

- Try to limit trips out in public (e.g., make one big grocery trip every two weeks rather than going more frequently).
- Continue to wear a cloth mask or face covering in public if it does not restrict your breathing.



THE STAY-AT-HOME ORDER IS LIFTED. NOW WHAT? *CONT.*

- Avoid touching your face and wash your hands often while in public and as soon as you can when you are back at home.
- Wear an outer layer of clothing (like a jacket or sweater) that you can take off and leave by the door as soon as you get home. This will minimize any germs brought into the house.
- Try to limit visits with people outside of your household, including friends and grandchildren.
- Continue social distancing. Social distancing does not mean social isolation. You can connect with loved ones virtually or write letters and send via mail. Or you can visit in your yard or a park where you can remain six feet away from guests.
- Help your family and friends understand why it is important that you not be exposed and remind them that people with the virus are contagious for several days before they show any symptoms. This is what makes the coronavirus so contagious.
- When outside of your home, continue to practice physical distancing (staying at least six feet away from others), and limit time spent in crowded environments.

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Maintaining Mental Health while Social Distancing

Staying at home and social distancing for long periods of time can take a toll on all of us and it is important to take care of your mental health as well as your physical health. Below are some tips for staying active and maintaining mental health while staying at home:

- Keep a routine and get plenty of sleep.
- Get moving, find ways to exercise at home.
- Eat healthy and drink lots of water.
- Meditate or engage in mindfulness activities.
- Take a break from reading or watching the news.
- Call family and friends, social distance doesn't mean social isolation!
- Try virtual activities: museum tours, online book clubs, or even exercise videos.
- Seek professional mental health services in your community if needed.

THE STAY-AT-HOME ORDER IS LIFTED. NOW WHAT? *CONT.*

➤ Pulmonary rehabilitation

At this time, we do not know when in-person pulmonary rehabilitation programs will resume. Pulmonary rehabilitation facilities present special risks because of the number of participants who are considered at-risk for severe COVID-19 and because of the close quarters in which many groups operate, which make social distancing difficult to achieve. Call your healthcare provider or pulmonary rehabilitation leader to learn what their plans are and to see if they are currently leading virtual programs. For recommendations of exercises that can be done at home, please visit <https://resphealth.org/coronavirus-effects-copd/> to get a list of exercises and additional resources. If you don't have access to a computer or smartphone, call Hannah Mestyanek at 312-628-0207 to receive this information by mail.

➤ Guidance on caring for children & social distancing

As family and friends start going back to work, you may be asked to watch your grandchildren or other children who may not yet be back in school or able to attend summer camp. Currently, the CDC and AARP recommend that older adults and people with serious underlying medical conditions continue to physically distance themselves from children who do not live in their households. If you are asked to care for children who do not live in your household, you can do so in ways that reduce your risk of contracting COVID-19. These include ensuring the children have limited contact with other people outside their households and making sure they practice good hygiene (washing hands, wearing a mask while out, etc.). If someone with COPD (or another high risk condition) is taking care of a child who is sick, consider social distancing within the house and having that child wear a cloth mask in the house (to prevent the spread of the virus to others).

➤ Continue to get routine vaccines

While we wait for a vaccine for COVID-19, we need to remember to obtain our regular flu or pneumonia vaccines. Preventing the flu and pneumonia is always important, but especially during a respiratory disease outbreak, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to do everything possible to reduce your risks of any illness and minimize possible exposure to coronavirus in healthcare settings.



THE DOs AND DON'Ts OF WEARING MASKS

In some places, wearing a cloth face covering or mask is now mandatory for indoor and some outdoor public spaces. In addition to continued social distancing, hand washing, and staying home as much as possible, face coverings can provide important protections against COVID-19 exposure.

For some people with COPD, asthma and other respiratory conditions, facial coverings may make breathing more difficult. If that is the case, we encourage you to consider alternatives that allow you to stay at home. For example, many grocery stores and other business offer delivery or you may ask a family member or friend to help you get the supplies you may need. Also, try to schedule your daily walk (or other outings) when others are less likely to be out.

If you can breathe comfortably while wearing a face mask, we want to share some tips to ensure it provides you with the most protection:

- Make sure the mask covers both your nose and mouth.
- The mask should fit snugly against the side of the face.
- Use the ties or ear loops to keep the mask in place.
- Use a mask that has multiple layers.
- If you wear a cloth mask, find one that can withstand being washed without damage.
- Make sure you remove your mask without touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Even with a mask, it's important to practice social distancing. Continuing to avoid crowds in parks, stores, and streets can help minimize your exposure to COVID-19.

PREPARING FOR A TELEHEALTH VISIT

One of the many effects from the coronavirus pandemic is the increased use of telehealth or virtual doctor appointments. Through video conferencing or telephone calls, patients can consult with their providers, address new signs or symptoms, ask questions about their conditions, and receive helpful information without leaving home. By staying out of hospitals, clinic waiting rooms, or private practices, patients are minimizing their potential exposure to COVID-19. Below are a few suggestions on preparing for a telehealth appointment:

- Check with the office before the appointment to make sure they have all the information they need.
- If you have an informal family caregiver, ask him/her to be available and join you for your appointment.
- Make a list of what you want to discuss and questions you may have.
- Be prepared to tell your provider about your family and medical history.
- Have as many of your vital numbers on hand as possible (weight, temperature, etc.)
- Try to be specific when describing symptoms or signs.
- Have a pen and paper handy to write down any important notes.
- Have all your medications or a current medication list within reach during the appointment.
- Test drive your equipment (computer, tablet, phone) prior to the appointment.

PLAN AHEAD FOR THE UNEXPECTED

We encourage people who do not live alone to have a plan in place should someone in your household becomes sick with COVID-19 or any other contagious illness.

1. Stay informed and connected. Make sure you get up-to-date information about the latest policies in your area. Create a list of emergency and medical contacts that can be easily accessed.
2. Identify a room or space in your home where the sick person can be separated from the rest of your household.
3. If someone does become ill, call your own healthcare provider to figure out the best way to protect yourself.
4. Provide symptom treatment: make sure the sick person is drinking fluids and getting plenty of rest. Be on the lookout for emergency warning signs like trouble breathing, new confusion, or bluish lips or face. Call your healthcare provider immediately if you notice any of these warning signs.
5. Have designated dishes, towels, and the like to minimize other household members' exposure.
6. Wash and disinfect surfaces the sick person may have touched, remember to wear gloves when touching the ill person, their environment, and soiled items or surfaces.

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For more information contact **Hannah** at **312-628-0207** or hmestyane@resphealth.org.

This newsletter is not intended to provide specific medical advice, but general information for people living with COPD and their caregivers. If you think you may have COPD, talk to your healthcare provider.

If you would like to receive more information for people living with COPD, please visit resphealth.org/copd.

Inspiration is edited by Khalilah Gates, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Medical Education, Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. We thank her for her assistance.

CONTACT RESPIRATORY HEALTH ASSOCIATION

If you would like to have upcoming issues of our free *Inspiration* newsletter delivered to your home, please contact **Hannah Mestyane** at **312-628-0207** or hmestyane@resphealth.org.

Please feel free to copy and distribute this newsletter. The issue can also be viewed online at RESPHEALTH.ORG/INSPIRATION.

Respiratory Health Association is committed to getting you the information you need to manage your COPD and stay healthy during this lung health emergency. We could not do this without the generous support from our community.

Please consider making a gift to support our COPD communications. You can call (312) 628-0251 or go online to resphealth.org/ donate to make a gift today. Or mail your donation to:

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WALK FOR HEALTHY LUNGS

Staying active is great for your physical and mental health. Whether you walk in your neighborhood or on a treadmill, consider making your miles matter as a member of Respiratory Health Association's **Lung Power Team!**

lung
POWER
team

Be a part of something powerful. Registration is just \$15 and you'll receive a team t-shirt. All proceeds benefit Respiratory Health Association's COPD & other lung health work.

To register by phone: **Call 312-628-0211**

To register online: resphealth.org/lungpowerteam