

# Being Informed and Staying Connected

As the new coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to impact our daily life, it's natural to be concerned about contracting or spreading the virus. For older adults, people with disabilities, and people with compromised immune systems, COVID-19 can be more overwhelming because of the greater risk for contracting the virus. Health care experts are recommending everyone stay home and keep a distance from people to limit their exposure. This pandemic is unprecedented and, even with the best planning, there is no playbook for responding to this crisis. Some responses have been panicked and with the variety of media sources available, information can be contradictory.

This document has been created to provide guidance on how we can thoughtfully and proactively respond to this pandemic while taking the best care of our health.

## Where can I find information about COVID-19?

When looking for information about COVID-19, be sure to choose reputable sources. Organizations that have expertise in health and communicable diseases include:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)
- World Health Organization: [who.int](https://www.who.int)
- U.S. Health and Human Services: [hhs.gov](https://www.hhs.gov)
- Texas Health and Human Services: [hhs.texas.gov](https://www.hhs.texas.gov)
- Texas Department of State Health Services: [dshs.texas.gov](https://www.dshs.texas.gov)

## What can I do to protect myself?

The organizations listed above have detailed information on what you can do to take care of yourself and your loved ones. Primary recommendations for older adults, people with disabilities and people with compromised immune systems include:

- Have a supply of the items you will need such as medication and food.
- Take precautions to keep space between yourself and others and if you are out in public, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash your hands often.
- Avoid crowds as much as possible.
- Avoid cruise travel and nonessential air travel.
- Stay home as much as possible to further reduce your risk of being exposed.

The following website has resources, information and tips on staying safe for people with disabilities: [scdd.ca.gov/](https://www.scdd.ca.gov/).

Revised April 30, 2020

*Reminder: Be aware of dishonest entities that use unfamiliar situations like these to take advantage of people. Currently there are no vaccinations for COVID-19, and any product claiming it will protect you from the virus is false. The trusted entities above will provide the most current advice on how to protect yourself and will never try to sell you a cure or remedy.*

## Reach out for help

This is a stressful time and it is important to know you are not alone. Federal, state and local organizations are adapting their programs and services to meet the changing needs of the community.

- **Seek support for your mental health:** If you need someone to talk to about the stress you are experiencing, a mental health professional can help.
  - A COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line has been set up offering mental health support for all Texans. Call 1-833-986-1919 to connect to a mental health professional.
  - To learn more about available services, visit [hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use/mental-health-substance-use-resources](https://hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use/mental-health-substance-use-resources).
  - This article has helpful tools on how to cope during difficult times: [psychologytools.com/assets/covid-19/guide\\_to\\_living\\_with\\_worry\\_and\\_anxiety\\_amidst\\_global\\_uncertainty\\_en-us.pdf](https://psychologytools.com/assets/covid-19/guide_to_living_with_worry_and_anxiety_amidst_global_uncertainty_en-us.pdf)
- **Find out what services are available:**
  - **For older adults:** Area Agencies on Aging are located all over Texas to help adults 60 and older and their caregivers find the services they need.
  - **For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities:** Local intellectual and developmental disabilities authorities can assist with eligibility determination, benefits screening, service coordination and more.
  - **For the whole family:** People living in multi-generational households can receive services for the whole family from an Aging and Disability Resource Center. Contact your ADRC to get information and one-on-one counseling on the full range of long-term services and supports available in Texas.

To find any of these resources, visit [hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/find-us/where-can-i-find-services](https://hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/find-us/where-can-i-find-services).

## What else can I do?

It might seem like everything is different now, but you can still observe social distancing while doing what you enjoy.

### **Exercise**

Maybe you used to exercise at a facility, but its temporary closure doesn't mean you can't exercise anymore. As long as you keep your distance from others, you can take your workout outside. Try going for a walk or doing some gardening. Add

some of your regular gym exercises into things you do around the house. Those 14-ounce cans of food make great impromptu weights. You can also order a free Texercise handbook from HHS that will take you through a variety of balance, strength, flexibility and endurance exercises you can do in your home. To learn more, visit [Texercise.com](https://www.texercise.com).

### **Stay Engaged**

A lot of us like getting together with friends for game night or learning new hobbies. While social distancing has made that more challenging, it is still possible to stay connected.

The following pages contain resources to help you connect with others, learn something new, and give back.

### **Learn Something New**

- **DOROT University Without Walls\***  
Access hundreds of classes in multiple languages.  
[dorotusa.org/our-programs/at-home/university-without-walls](https://dorotusa.org/our-programs/at-home/university-without-walls)
- **Project Gutenberg**  
[.gutenberg.org/](https://www.gutenberg.org/)
- **Senior Planet Virtual Classes\***  
An array of free and members-only classes.  
[seniorplanet.org/get-involved/online/](https://seniorplanet.org/get-involved/online/)
- **Silver Kite\***  
Provides a variety of virtual events during the COVID-19 outbreak.  
[silverkite.us/](https://www.silverkite.us/)

### **Give Back**

- **AARP Virtual Volunteering**  
Visit this website to learn how to volunteer from your home.  
[createthegood.aarp.org/volunteer-ideas/virtual.html](https://createthegood.aarp.org/volunteer-ideas/virtual.html)

### **Get Crafty**

If you can't make it to your usual craft class, there are several websites that have ideas, instructions and videos to get you started.

- [diyjoy.com/fun-diy-ideas-adults/](https://diyjoy.com/fun-diy-ideas-adults/)
- [burlapandblue.com/top-diy-crafts-for-adults/](https://burlapandblue.com/top-diy-crafts-for-adults/)
- [instructables.com/](https://www.instructables.com/)

### **Travel – Virtually!**

- **Google Arts and Culture**  
Explore thousands of museums for free.  
[artsandculture.google.com/](https://artsandculture.google.com/)
- **The Monterey Bay Aquarium**  
This famous aquarium offers live video feeds on several of their exhibits.

[montereybayaquarium.org/animals/live-cams](http://montereybayaquarium.org/animals/live-cams)

- **NASA at Home**  
Explore space and beyond with NASA.  
[nasa.gov/specials/nasaathome/index.html](http://nasa.gov/specials/nasaathome/index.html)
- **The San Diego Zoo**  
Watch live feeds of animals at popular exhibits.  
[kids.sandiegozoo.org/videos](http://kids.sandiegozoo.org/videos)

### **Meetings and Video Conferences**

- **Skype**  
Screen sharing, one-to-one meetings/video conferences.  
[skype.com/en/](http://skype.com/en/)

### **Group Fun and Games**

- **Virtual Reading via Caribu\***  
Connects people through reading or drawing together.  
[caribu.com/](http://caribu.com/)
- **Words with Friends**  
Play a turn-based word game with your friends.  
[zynga.com/games/words-with-friends-2/](http://zynga.com/games/words-with-friends-2/)

### **1:1 Mobile Messaging**

- **HeyTell\***  
Instantly send voice messages to one other person.  
[heytell.com/front.html](http://heytell.com/front.html)

### **Social Connection**

- **Best Day of My Life So Far**  
A listening tool to help you reach out to older adults and share their life stories.  
[bestdayofmylifsofar.org/](http://bestdayofmylifsofar.org/)
- **Empowering the Ages – Sharing Smiles**  
Connects youth and older adults via email or post mail.  
[empoweringtheages.org/sharing-smiles/](http://empoweringtheages.org/sharing-smiles/)
- **Inspire**  
Online support and instant messaging for people with a health condition.  
[inspire.com/](http://inspire.com/)
- **Stitch\***  
Social media platform that connects people 50 and older.  
[stitch.net/](http://stitch.net/)

## **Caregiving/Care Tracker**

- **CaringBridge**  
Create a journal to stay connected to your family and friends.  
[caringbridge.org/](http://caringbridge.org/)
- **Caring Village**  
Designed for caregivers to communicate with each other and track information about their loved one.  
[caringvillage.com/](http://caringvillage.com/)
- **How's Mom**  
Provides families with a loved one living in a care facility to communicate with care staff.  
[howsmom.app/](http://howsmom.app/)
- **My SOS Family - Emergency SOS\***  
Instantly message preset contacts in case of an emergency.  
[mysosfamily.com/](http://mysosfamily.com/)

\*This resource has a free option or a free trial, but it also has options that cost money.