

COVID-19 increases the risk of more serious illness for those who are aged 65 and over. Restrictions surrounding the pandemic may also disproportionately affect older patients who rely on close human interaction for essential supplies, as well as for their mental well-being.

Family physicians can be proactive in helping older patients plan, cope and discuss their wishes in the event of illness.

ENCOURAGE SOCIAL CONNECTION

The lack of visitors may limit the most meaningful part of an older person's life and reduces the ability to notice changes in cognition and function. If possible, arrange regular phone calls or video calls with the patient.

Help patients establish a very limited number of people (family, friends, neighbours, carers) who may visit safely.

Advise patients on other tools and options for social connectedness – introduce them to video call apps, email or other online chat tools.

ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The SAIL Home Activity Program (www.findingbalancebc.ca/exercise/sail-home-activity-program/) provides guided exercises for older people in multiple languages, including written and video guides.

HELP PATIENTS PLAN

Encourage patients to plan for the event they are unable to leave the house for two weeks or in the event their caregiver becomes ill.

Have patients note phone numbers of people who could run errands or provide emergency care.

Advise patients to stock up on a two-week supply of nutritious and non-perishable food, non-prescription medication, pet food and other essentials. Ask whether they have the means to afford to do so, as well as the space. See the [Poverty Tool](#), available on the BCCFP website, for guidance.

Hold a goals of care discussion with patients to explore their wishes for if they become seriously ill during the pandemic. [See our resource for a discussion guide.](#)

Advise patients that they can call 2-1-1 for help accessing local supports.

INTRODUCE HELPFUL TECHNOLOGY

Advise older patients that there are apps that can support them at home, such as food delivery apps, health and fitness videos and apps, games and puzzle apps, music apps, news websites, and apps that help with notes and reminders (shopping lists, medication times, etc.).

Alert patients to the BC COVID-19 self-assessment tool at <https://bc.thrive.health/>

Alert patients to [common online or telephone scam techniques](#).

MANAGE PRESCRIPTION SUPPLIES

Review patients' medication and medical supplies to ensure adequate supply (one to three months) and advise on how to collect refills safely. Pharmacists generally advise:

- Family physicians fax prescription to patient's pharmacy of choice; most pharmacies offer free delivery to patients.
- Mark any acute prescriptions as "RUSH" for immediate dispensing.
- Write down "CWR" (call when ready); pharmacy will notify patients to avoid unnecessary patient trips.

Help patients locate information about seniors-only hours at pharmacies.

www.drugsearch.ca allows you to search for the most affordable drug options.

MONITORING FOR COVID-19 SYMPTOMS

Share simple facts about COVID-19, including how to identify symptoms, and give clear information about how to reduce risk of infection. It may be helpful to display information in writing or pictures.

Older patients may present with mild symptoms that are disproportionate to the severity of their illness.

Anticipate atypical symptoms in patients over the age of 75, such as delirium, falls, generalized weakness, functional decline, dizziness, chest pain, gastrointestinal problems, and anosmia. Most infected older patients will not present with fever.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BCCFP COVID-19 Resources: www.bccfp.bc.ca/covid-19
www.canadiangeriatrics.ca/covid-19-resources/
www.rgptoronto.ca/resources/covid-19/

SOURCES

www.canadiangeriatrics.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CGS-COVID-19-Recomm.-for-Older-Adults_FinalEN.pdf
www.divisionsbc.ca/victoria/COVID19
www.gedcollaborative.com/article/covid-19-in-older-adults-key-points-for-emergency-department-providers/
www.rgptoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Presentations-in-Frail-Older-Adults-U-of-C-and-U-of-T.pdf