

Caregiver Concerns about In-Home Care during COVID-19

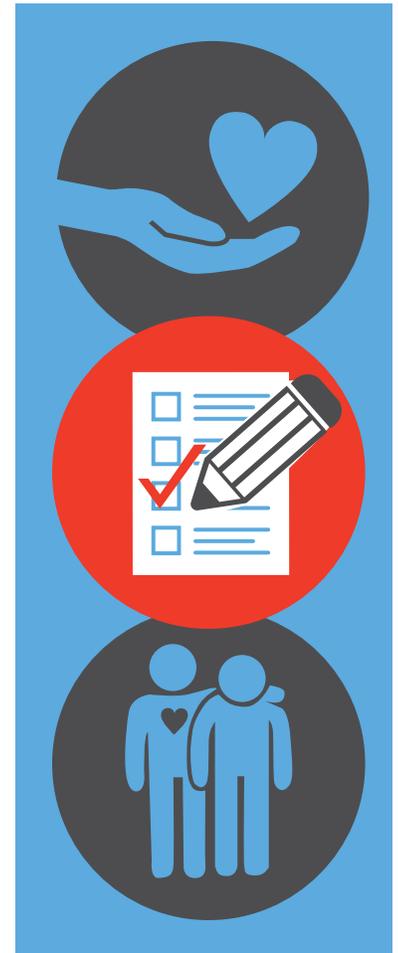
In the United States, there are more than 40 million family caregivers, many of whom are caring for loved ones who benefit from services in the home. These in-home care services may be provided by a range of professionals including registered nurses, social workers and other social service professionals, and physical or occupational therapists. In-home care can also be provided by direct care workers, also known as home health aides or personal care assistants—they provide hands-on, non-medical personal care such as help with dressing or bathing. Hospice home health aides are trained to provide supportive services to individuals at home with serious illness. Family caregivers may feel uncertain about allowing any of these people into their homes given the elevated risk of COVID-19 for older adults. AARP offers guidance to help family caregivers be strong advocates in keeping their loved ones safe and healthy. Here are five tips for family caregivers concerned about in-home care during COVID-19.

1. Assess Your Need for In-Home Care Services

- The decision to use in-home care during COVID-19 is a personal one. It depends on many factors. The level of care your loved one needs will help you make this decision.
- Given broad recommendations to practice “physical distancing,” if your loved one can remain safely in the home without in-home care they should stay home and discourage visitors. Instead inquire with your loved one’s in-home care provider about using technology for virtual visits through phone or video.
- If receiving in-home care is critical to your loved one’s health and safety, then it is best to continue to receive that care.
- If you are new to caregiving and need support now, it is important to find the right in-home care provider for you and your loved one. Typically, you can arrange for in-home care through an agency or hire an independent aide (commonly referred to as “private hire”).
- Be sure to ask about licensing and certification, background checks, health records (such as annual influenza vaccine, proof of immunity through vaccination records and/or lab tests), training and costs. Get references from former or current employers to ensure good quality and ask questions specifically about precautions the agency or individual is taking during COVID-19 when making your choice.
- Contact your health insurance provider (Medicare, Medicaid, Veterans Administration, or private insurance including long-term care insurance if applicable) to determine your loved one’s eligibility for in-home care services. During the COVID-19 public health emergency, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued recent rule clarifications which may mean your loved one who didn’t qualify for in-home care previously may now be eligible.

2. Contact Your Agency or Individual In-Home Care Provider

- If you use an agency for your in-home care, contact them to learn their policy on caring for clients during COVID-19. It can be reassuring to ask about the measures they are taking to stop the spread of COVID-19.



RESOURCES

Visit AARP’s Caregiving during Coronavirus resources at:

www.aarp.org/coronavirus

Find local caregiving resources at:

www.aarp.org/crf

or call 211

for more local resources

- Consider asking these questions of your in-home care agency:

- What precautions are they taking? What is their communicable disease and quarantine policy?
 - Do they have a universal masking policy (all employees wear a surgical mask even when the client and the employee do not have COVID-19 symptoms)?
 - Do they have sufficient personal protective equipment and training on how to use it?
 - What is their health monitoring policy (e.g., screenings)? How are they making sure in-home care providers are not sick when working and making home visits?
 - What is the rotation of in-home care providers I should expect? How many people and what are their schedules? What back-up plans are in place to provide another in-home care provider, if the regularly scheduled one is unable to work?
 - How are they ensuring that in-home care providers working with COVID-19 positive clients are not working with any COVID-19 negative clients?
 - Do they offer “virtual visits” over the phone or computer to reduce the number of times in-home care providers come to the home?
 - Do they offer remote monitoring equipment and services to their in-home care providers (like weight scales, blood pressure or temperature measuring devices that send the results wirelessly to the in-home care provider)?
- If you have privately hired an independent aide, consider using these questions above as a guide. As their employer it is your responsibility to ensure a safe work environment for the aide.

3. Take Extra Precautions Before In-Home Care Providers Come into the Home

- Talk to every person who enters the home about what to expect during COVID-19; specifically, the in-home care provider should certify each time they enter your home that they do not have a cough or fever currently or in the last 14 days.
- Some agencies are requiring a body temperature check upon entry to a client’s home, others are requiring employees check their temperature at the start of each shift. It is important to note that some people with COVID-19 do not have a fever.
- Request that they wash their hands as soon as they enter the home and before they touch anything. Provide liquid soap and paper towels if the in-home care provider doesn’t bring it with them.
- Ask in-home care providers to only bring essential equipment and supplies for the visit into your home. Ask that they leave their bag by the door. Consider asking them to wear disposable booties over their shoes.
- For long-distance family caregivers worried about home care for a loved one, consider asking the in-home care provider to call you or use video technology to assure you of the precautions they are taking with your loved one.

4. Report Symptoms to Your In-Home Care Provider and Agency Immediately

- If you or someone in your household tests positive for COVID-19, notify your in-home care provider or agency immediately. Doing so does not necessarily mean they will no longer provide care for you.

5. Stay Connected and Engaged with People Caring for Your Loved one

- Being open and honest about your concerns and worries about exposure to COVID-19 will build greater trust in your relationship.
- Keep in mind that in-home care providers have families too and share the same concerns for themselves. Show gratitude for their commitment to caring for your loved one during these stressful times.
- Staying in close communication with the agency, your loved one’s care coordinator and/or the in-home care providers who come to the home will help build confidence in your decision around using in-home care services.