



Fall 2020 Edition

### In this Issue

Fall Newsletter Introduction

COVID-19: Symptoms and Signs, Actions to Take, and  
Conditions That Increase Risk for Serious Complications

Staying Safe in the Community

Reputable COVID-19 Resources

What Do We Do Now?

# HCQU CARES



# Fall Newsletter Introduction

By: Margie Grieser, RN, CDDN

As fall approaches, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues. While integrating the latest regulations and guidelines into the daily routines of people with intellectual disability/autism (ID/A) can be challenging, caregivers continue to do their best to make the community experience as safe and enjoyable as possible for the individuals they support. To show their appreciation, the Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs issued the following public statement to recognize and thank caregivers for their dedication to emphasizing the importance of wearing a mask, social distancing, hand washing, and proper cough/sneeze hygiene.

*"It's [sic] is no secret that COVID-19 has created complications to service delivery within our programs. But despite the barriers, we want to recognize all the heroes who have been in the field, as well as those providing supports remotely. It is your ability to adapt, shift, accommodate, and modify to this situation that has enabled the people we support to receive all the services they depend on and are critical for them to manage the pandemic. So, this is just a little way for us to let all the supporters out there know how grateful we are for the work you do!"* (PA Office of Developmental Programs, 2020, para. 1)

Being mindful and keeping a positive outlook – focusing on what you can do instead to what you wish you could do – demonstrate a calm, practical approach to a period of uncertainty. For instance, one person with ID/A stated, "Enjoy the fun, small stuff that you can do...This is one time I feel fortunate to be on the spectrum. Social isolation is almost normal for me." Another individual involved in the conversation said, "[my] seasonal allergies seems to be one of the 'pros' of wearing the mask" (Uppal, 2020). It is inspiring that some people with ID/A found a bright side to the pandemic!

This edition of the HCQU CARES newsletter provides insight into why some people with ID/A are at a higher risk than others for coronavirus and offers information about methods to help prevent the spread of the virus. The articles include information, tools, and resources to assist caregivers and self-advocates to be safe and healthy during the pandemic.

---

## References:

Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs (ODP). (2020). Thank You! Thank You! Thank You! Retrieved from <https://www.myodp.org/mod/book/view.php?id=25106&chapterid=270>

Uppal, D. (2020). Self-Advocate Perspectives on Returning to the Community (Video). Aid in PA. Retrieved from <https://aidinpa.org/self-advocate-perspectives-on-returning-to-the-community/>





## COVID-19: Symptoms and Signs, Actions to Take, and Conditions That Increase Risk for Serious Complications

By: Jodie Dale, RN

Individuals rely on caregivers to help them stay safe and healthy, especially during a pandemic. To protect themselves, those they support, and others from COVID-19 infection, caregivers need to know the signs and symptoms associated with the disease, the actions to take if someone is exposed to or infected with it, and the underlying conditions that increase the risk for complications.

Symptoms of COVID-19 typically appear within 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. Symptoms vary and can range from mild to severe in intensity. Contact a medical provider if an individual is experiencing any of the following symptoms or if you suspect they have been exposed to the virus.

- Fever or chills
- Cough, shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea (Centers for Disease Control, 2020b)

Caregivers supporting people with ID/A must recognize non-verbal signs of COVID-19 for individuals who cannot express symptoms verbally. For example, an individual with general COVID-19 symptoms might resist getting out of bed or refuse to participate in their usual daily activities. Report changes in a person's behaviors to a supervisor within your agency or a medical provider.

## Signs of a COVID-19 Medical Emergency Require Immediate Medical Attention

Someone experiencing a COVID-19 medical emergency will appear distressed and look very different than they usually look. If any of the following signs are observed or reported, call 911 immediately and notify the operator that you are requesting care for someone who has or might have COVID-19:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Bluish lips or face (CDC, 2020b)

When a person is infected with or has been exposed to COVID-19, preventing the spread of the disease is critical. Until a medical provider determines it is safe for a person to end home isolation and be around others, the following guidelines can help prevent the spread of the virus to others.

- Stay at home except to seek medical care.
- Avoid public transportation.
- Stay in a separate room, if possible, to limit contact with other people and animals.
- Wear a mask when around other people.
- Practice good cough and sneeze hygiene by sneezing and coughing into elbow or tissue.
- Wash hands frequently for 20 seconds.
- Avoid sharing household items.
- Clean high-touch surfaces frequently (CDC, 2020c).

Certain underlying conditions have been identified as putting a person at a higher risk for serious complications associated with COVID-19, including death. Adults 65 or more years of age have been identified as more likely to get severely ill from this virus, and 8 out of 10 COVID-19 related deaths in the United States were those age 65+ (CDC, 2020a). Individuals of any age who have one of the following medical conditions are also at a higher risk.

- Cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- Lung disease
- Immunocompromised state
- Obesity
- Serious heart conditions
- Sickle cell disease
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Neurological conditions (dementia)
- Liver disease
- Pregnancy
- Smoking
- Blood disorders (CDC, 2020a)

Be aware of which individuals are at increased risk for serious complications from a COVID-19 infection. Minimize their chance of exposure to the virus by encouraging them to avoid unnecessary interactions with others, observe social distancing when in public, wear a mask, and wash hands often. Caregivers must follow these recommended precautions at all times to protect these individuals and everyone in the home – including themselves.

Knowledge is power. Stay informed of the most recent information about COVID-19 and follow related regulations and guidelines to help decrease the risk of COVID-19 infection for you and the individuals you support.

---

**References:**

Centers for Disease Control (CDC). (2020a, August 10). People at Increased Risk. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control (CDC). (2020b, May 13). Symptoms of Coronavirus. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

Centers for Disease Control (CDC). (2020c, May 8). What to Do If You Are Sick. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>



## Staying Safe in the Community

By: Pam Lodge, BSN, RN

As people transition back into the community, it is important to stay informed of the current situation and to follow the restrictions and guidelines set by the government agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the state Department of Health. Developing a transition plan in advance can help ensure safety and reduce anxiety that individuals and caregivers might have about resuming activities in the community.

Before going into the community:

- Follow the recommended guidelines for the area. All areas are not the same; guidelines might vary from one community to the next.
- Know the restrictions in place for where you are and where you plan to go. Certain activities might be restricted in communities/counties with high numbers of positive COVID-19 cases while permitted in areas with fewer positive cases.
- Assure that participants have the opportunity to practice proper hand hygiene, wear masks, and maintain social distancing. Take a supply of hand sanitizer and extra masks on all trips into the community.

A transition plan that follows CDC guidelines and includes proactive measures can help prevent the spread of the virus in the community and at home. The plan should list actions caregivers are expected to take before, during, and after various types of activities to protect the health of all participants. Consider the following recommendations when developing a plan for resuming various community activities:

## Restaurants

- **Call ahead to ask about safety practices** – Before going to eat at a restaurant, call the restaurant to ask about their safety practices.
  - Are the employees required to wear masks or face coverings?
  - Does the restaurant disinfect high-touch surfaces regularly according to current guidelines?
  - Are tables positioned to allow social distancing?
  - Does the restaurant have a digital or disposable menu?
- **Follow guidelines for dining-in** – Educate and remind individuals about the new rules for visiting a restaurant. For example, they should stand at least 6 feet (2 meters) from others when waiting in line for service; they should wear a mask or face covering as much as possible when not eating; and they should wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer after touching surfaces.
- **Follow guidelines for takeout, curbside, and delivery** – Educate and remind individuals to wear a mask or face covering and practice social distancing when picking up a takeout order, whether inside the restaurant or in the curbside pickup zone. If food is to be delivered to the home, they should request it be left in a safe place outside the home, such as the porch or the building's lobby. Remind them to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer after handling the packaging for their food.

## Places of Worship

- **Call ahead to ask about safety practices** – Before going to a place of worship, call ahead to make sure they are open for services. Ask about their safety practices. Find out if there is a limit on the number of people permitted to gather for worship.
- **Follow guidelines for gatherings** – Educate and remind individuals about the new rules for worship gatherings. For example, they should remain at least 6 feet (2 meters) away from others; they should wear a mask or face covering; and they should wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer after touching surfaces or items.

## Gyms

- **Call ahead to ask about safety practices** – Before going to the gym, call ahead to see if the gym is open and to find out if there is a limit on how many members are allowed inside at the same time. Explain to individuals that they may have to reserve a block of time in advance or make an appointment to attend the gym.
- **Verify the cleaning protocols** – Caregivers may want to ask about the facility's cleaning and disinfecting policies and whether the locker room or bathroom is accessible. If the individual goes to the gym, discuss the importance of following any guidelines that the gym may have in place, such as when to wear a mask and social distancing policies. Individuals may be asked to clean equipment before and after using it.
- **Ask about online exercise opportunities** – If an individual needs assistance from a caregiver to attend the gym or if the individual is at higher risk for illness, caregivers may want to encourage the individual to engage in activities at home until it is safe to go back to the gym. Caregivers may want to ask if the gym offers virtual classes or training.

## Salons

- **Call ahead to make an appointment** – Salons that used to welcome walk-ins might require appointments now. Ask if a caregiver is permitted to stay with the individual during the appointment.
- **Inquire about the precautions and guidelines** – When making the appointment, ask about the safety measures that are in place, including the salon's disinfecting practices. Explain to the individual the importance of continuing to wear a face mask or face covering at all times when inside the salon.
- **Explain the process** – Explain to the individual that they might be asked to wait in the car or outside until the appointment begins. Prepare the individual for attending the appointment alone, if necessary. If an individual has difficulty attending alone, explain that they might have to wait to go to the salon until it is safer.



## Grocery stores

- **Consider ordering online** – Many grocery stores allow people to order online for home delivery or curbside pickup.
- **Call ahead** – Before going to a grocery store, visit the store's website or call the store to verify the current hours of operation and the precautions in place.
- **Consider shopping during low-volume times** – Visiting a store early in the morning or late at night can help to avoid crowds. Many stores assign special hours for individuals at higher risk of serious illness to reduce the risk for exposure.
- **Follow guidelines for shopping** – Talk with individuals about the importance of disinfecting the handles of shopping carts or baskets, wearing a mask, and practicing social distancing while shopping and waiting in lines. Help individuals practice using floor markings to maintain safe distance and traffic flow throughout the store.
- **Practice good hand hygiene** – Remind individuals to apply hand sanitizer after leaving the store, and instruct them to wash hands with soap and water upon arrival at home.

## Pharmacy

- **Inquire about a prescription pick-up plan** – Talk with the pharmacist and doctors regarding a plan to order and pick up all of the individual's prescriptions at the same time.
- **Call in prescriptions** – Calling in prescription orders ahead of time can help avoid prolonged waiting times.
- **Explore options for safe prescription pick-up** – Use an alternative pick-up method, such as drive-thru window, curbside pick-up, mail order, or home delivery, to decrease exposure to others.

## Community Activities

- **Check with state and local authorities** – Before leaving to participate in a community activity, check with local authorities to confirm the activity is expected to occur; check with state and local authorities to learn current restrictions in place for specific types of activities.
- **Bring extra supplies** – Always have extra supplies available, including hand sanitizer and masks.
- **Call ahead** – It is also a good practice to call ahead to any event or contact your local chamber of commerce to get information on events and the safety measures that will be in place.

As businesses and venues continue to re-open, applicable guidelines and restrictions continue to change. It is normal to have feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. Caregivers must stay informed of changing conditions and situations. Ask questions about current safety measures and guidelines. If an individual does not feel comfortable about going out into the community, consider postponing an activity or visit for a later time. The next article explains how the Individual Transition Guide can assist caregivers to determine if an individual is ready to return to community activities.

---

## References:

- 2019 novel coronavirus resources. (2020). Lippincott NursingCenter | Professional Development for Nurses. Retrieved from <https://www.nursingcenter.com/coronavirus>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020). How to Protect Yourself & Others. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>
- Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (2020). COVID-19 Guidance and Resources. Retrieved from <https://www.governor.pa.gov/covid-19/>
- Mayo Clinic. (2020). Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/symptoms-causes/syc-20479963>
- Mayo Clinic (2020). COVID-19 safety: Tips for travel, restaurants, and the gym. Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/coronavirus-safety-tips/art-20485967>
- Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (2020). Developmental Programs. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/providers/Providers/Pages/Developmental-Programs.aspx>





## Reputable COVID-19 Resources

By: Lydia Lingis, BSN, RN

The volume of news and information available about the COVID-19 pandemic can get overwhelming. At the same time, COVID-19 information changes daily, so it can be challenging to find resources with up-to-date information. It is important to check frequently for the latest information. Current COVID-19 resources specific to caregivers supporting individuals with ID/A are available through the Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), the Pennsylvania Department of Health, and the Kepro HCQU.

ODP is dedicated to providing updated information on COVID-19. The “Coronavirus (COVID-19)” page on MyODP.com provides guidance through announcements, educational webinars, and provider and family resources related to life at home and in the community. The page offers the Individual Transition Guide (ITG) to assist individuals, families, providers, Supports Coordinators, and other care team members to identify supports and services needed for individuals to return to activities outside of the home. To view the page, [click here](#).

The ITG presents questions and resources in this tool that can guide and inform the person’s return to community activities. It contains 6 core areas to consider when individuals begin re-entry into the community:

- Desire to return to community activity and settings
- Physical health status
- Infection control measures
- Mental health and behavioral health needs
- Changes in routine
- Conditions of supports and services

The Pennsylvania Department of Health's "Coronavirus (COVID-19)" page provides data on total cases, number of negative test results, and total people who have recovered from COVID-19. In addition, it contains information and guidance about symptoms and testing, stopping the spread, contact tracing, resources, data, frequently asked questions, and translated materials. It explains Pennsylvania's staged re-opening and outlines strategies to promote safe social interactions for individuals, businesses, and schools while continuing to prioritize public health. To view the page, [click here](#).

The Kepro HCQU created a "Coronavirus (COVID-19)" section on the Resources > Informational Materials page of its website. This section contains informational packets, fact sheets, articles, and rehearsal guides. The informational packets contain HCQU resources, CDC handouts/posters, and guidance on developing policies and procedures to mitigate challenges when caregivers and individuals test positive for COVID-19. The rehearsal guides contain pictures, concrete ideas, and clear, brief instructions for individuals with ID/A to prepare them for COVID-19 testing, wearing a face mask, and reducing the spread of infection. The articles and fact sheets discuss COVID-19 in terms of anxiety, boredom, remaining connected to others, infection control, and the use of personal protective equipment. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) section will be in the middle of the page. To view the page, [click here](#).

Knowing where to find current, reliant COVID-19 resources enables caregivers to provide quality support, know what to expect, and feel more confident navigating through uncertain times as the pandemic continues.

---

**References:**

Kepro Health Care Quality Unit. (2020). Informational Materials- Coronavirus (COVID-19). Retrieved from <https://hcqu.kepro.com/resources/informational-materials/>

Pennsylvania Department of Health. (2020, August 12). Coronavirus (COVID-19). Retrieved from <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs. (2020, August 12). Coronavirus (COVID-19). Retrieved from <https://www.myodp.org/mod/page/view.php?id=26808>



# What Do We Do Now?

By: Heather Capo, BSN, RN

This is a question that many people have been asking lately. We have been living with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for six months, and it seems as if almost everything in our daily lives has changed. Some things are starting to return to a more normal routine, but other things are not. You may be able to visit some familiar places, such as stores, parks, work, or day programs. However, even going out to those places is different – people are wearing masks; people are concerned about how far away they stay from each other; and people are just worried! We might be able to see friends and families again, but only in certain places and while taking certain precautions. For those who support individuals with ID/A, it might be difficult to explain why things are the way they are and what they can and cannot do during these times. This is especially true when the guidelines and plans are complicated and change frequently. Below are a few basic principles to help you navigate through these challenging times.

## **Look to reliable sources for information**

Different sources seem to offer different information about COVID-19. Even news stations tend to put their own 'spin' on things. To make it more confusing, friends and family members might get their information from other sources, and the guidelines for getting back into the community can be confusing and different for various places. To make sense of this confusion, get your information from the experts.

The state of Pennsylvania has developed guidelines for which activities are safe and what rules to follow when out in the community. This information is available on the Pennsylvania Department of Health website, to view [click here](#).

National institutions like the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) provide current and reliable information about health and safety during the pandemic, to view [click here](#).

In addition, each provider agency has developed its own plan, based in part on the state guidelines, for operating during the pandemic. Check with your agency to learn what they are doing and what activities are allowed. This includes day program providers and employment venues, as well. Knowing the facts and the rules offers a level of predictability and allows for greater preparedness.

### **Stay connected**

What does “staying connected” mean? For some people, it might mean having daily or weekly phone calls with the people who are important to them. For others, it might mean following the new rules for social distancing and wearing a mask in order to visit loved ones safely. People with health concerns and/or anxiety about COVID-19 might choose to use technology to have video calls with their friends or family.

Some groups and organizations, such as churches and clubs, are broadcasting services online, so that people who are not able or do not feel safe going out into the community yet can participate from home. Being involved virtually can provide some sense of routine and connectedness to the parts of our lives that have become more limited in access. This approach is being applied to other activities, too. Some agencies are re-introducing in-person day activities to some individuals and offering an online portal for others to participate from home. Virtual participation is being used with exercise groups, art lessons, and talk therapy sessions, as well.

### **Stay busy**

Keeping one’s mind and body busy can help a person reduce anxiety and maintain a positive focus. During times of change, when people must adjust to a “new normal,” focusing on what can be done is more helpful than focusing on what cannot be done. If you were to sit down and make a list, you would find there are many activities that can be done safely at home or in the community and allow for social distancing.

Have you ever tried painting or knitting? Do you enjoy watching things grow? Do you enjoy moving your body or dancing to music? This could be the perfect time to get back into an activity that you used to do or to explore a new hobby! Most people have access to technology that can help them get started, learn by watching videos, or find a virtual/online group.

- The ARC offers a list of 75 stay-at-home activities for keeping busy, to view [click here](#).
- People interested in caring for plants or gardening can learn about the benefits, to view [click here](#).

Visit the Kepro HCQU website for a 6-week pandemic activity challenge for self-advocates that suggests themed weekly activities to enrich your life or the lives of those you support. The pandemic activity challenge workbooks are available at:

Week 1: [Let's Keep it Clean](#)  
Week 2: [Let's Eat Healthy](#)  
Week 3: [Let's be Safe in the Kitchen](#)  
Week 4: [Let's Think, Create, and Relax](#)  
Week 5: [Let's Move](#)  
Week 6: [Celebrate Me](#)

The National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD) offers disability-specific videos for people who wish to use a tablet or computer to exercise with others from home. To view the list of videos, [click here](#).

- Consult your doctor or health care provider before starting any exercise program.

Hopefully the suggestions and resources mentioned above will give caregivers and self-advocates ideas for how to stay happy and healthy during the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic.



---

## References:

75 Stay-At-Home Activities. The Arc of Minnesota. (2020, May). <https://arcminnesota.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/75-Stay-at-Home-Activities-from-The-Arc-US.pdf>

Bennie, M. (2020, August 5). How Does Your Garden Grow? Mental Health, Wellness & Skills Development Through Gardening. Autism Awareness. <https://autismawarenesscentre.com/how-does-your-garden-grow-mental-health-wellness-skills-development-through-gardening/>

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Coronavirus in Pennsylvania. <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

Exercise Video List : NCHPAD - Building Inclusive Communities. National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD). <https://www.nchpad.org/351/2037/Exercise-Video-List>

Pandemic Activity Workbooks Weeks 1 - 6. KEPRO. <https://hcqu.kepro.com/resources/informational-materials>



## Contact Us

Kepro Southwestern PA HCQU  
8981 Norwin Ave., Suite 201  
North Huntingdon, PA 15642

Toll Free: 888.321.5861  
Office: 724.864.0715  
Fax: 1.844.747.9591  
[hcqu\\_pa@Kepro.com](mailto:hcqu_pa@Kepro.com)

## Connect with Kepro

