



The American Academy of Nursing Calls for Caution and Care as the Coronavirus Continues to Spread

Attention to the Older Adult, Frail, and Immunodeficient are Paramount

Washington, DC (March, 10, 2020)— The American Academy of Nursing (Academy) amplifies the call for necessary precautions as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to spread. In a [briefing](#) yesterday, members of the White House Coronavirus Taskforce addressed several considerations related to COVID-19, from the economic impact to the real and pressing health considerations. A particularly important focus remains on the populations most vulnerable to COVID-19. It was reinforced that individuals with pre-existing conditions (of all age groups), older adults, and those individuals with immunodeficiencies are at the greatest risk. Essential safeguards for these populations, particularly immunodeficient individuals and those who have serious acute and chronic medical conditions (such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory diseases, and cancer), extend to their family members and other caregivers. During this time, when information is crucial, taking the necessary precautions and seeking guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), the [World Health Organization](#), and individual healthcare providers must be a top priority to slow community spread and protect public health.

“Specializing in gerontology for several decades, I know first-hand how critical it is to be vigilant when caring for the older adult population,” said Academy President Eileen Sullivan-Marx, PhD, RN, FAAN. “Many older adults have chronic conditions or multi-morbidity factors that place them at greater risk, particularly with the spread of this type of virus. A lack of access to care, information, or resources as well as social isolation only further intensifies the need for providers, family members, and caregivers to support the older adult population during this risky time. Ensuring they have sufficient supplies of their medications, over-the-counter medicines to reduce fever, and groceries, as [noted by the CDC](#), is a priority.”

The American Academy of Nursing [has supported](#) the need for emergency funding that would quickly advance investments in research, key domestic public health programs, and response mechanisms, among other measures, to curb the outbreak. The Academy commends Congress for passing and the President for signing into law an emergency spending package totaling \$8.3 billion late last week. However, more effort is required to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the public’s health. This includes continued investment in the supply of protective gear for all health providers, the public health infrastructure, and resources for occupational health, public health, and school nurses. Just as critically, this also involves trusted, timely, and consistent communication.

It has been noted that gaps in communication can have negative effects on outbreaks, epidemics, and pandemics.^{1,2,3} As communities, healthcare workers, infectious disease experts, as well as federal and

¹ Dzau, V. & Sands, P. 2016. Beyond the Ebola battle-winning the war against future epidemics. *The New England Journal of Medicine*. 2016; 375: 203–204

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2019. *Exploring Lessons Learned from a Century of Outbreaks: Readiness for 2030: Proceedings of a Workshop*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25391>.

³ Corless, Inge B. et al. 2018. Expanding nursing's role in responding to global pandemics 5/14/2018 Nursing Outlook, Volume 66, Issue 4, 412 - 415

global agencies continue to study, prepare, protect, and care, the response to the coronavirus remains fluid and reliable information is essential. Variations occur among health care settings and community exposure. For example, long-term care facilities and senior living facilities are at a particularly high risk, which requires healthcare professionals, administration, and visitors to be steadfast in monitoring the health of older adults and themselves. Regularly checking updates from the CDC and local health authorities is vital so that all providers and individuals can react in real-time and prevent more cases of coronavirus. At the most fundamental level, infection control experts, including Academy Fellow Elaine Larson, PhD, RN, FAAN, are unwavering in their advice to properly wash your hands and adhere to [best practices](#) regarding glove and mask use to mitigate spread of the virus and protect yourself.⁴

“The nursing profession has long practiced readiness, caution, and care when responding to public health emergencies,” said Dr. Sullivan-Marx. “At this moment, the American Academy of Nursing calls for heightened attention to vulnerable populations, including older adults, as COVID-19 impacts communities. This requires the support of local government programs, increased education through community outreach, timely and trusted communications, and leveraging data sources, such as registries that identify at-risk individuals.”

The American Academy of Nursing represents expert nursing Fellows around the globe that have documented experience in responding to public health crises. Within the organization’s Expert Panels, focused on [24 aspects of care, populations, and systems](#), are recognized leaders who are working within their communities to combat the spread of COVID-19. Our Fellows stand ready to work with local and state officials on task forces to prevent or limit community spread. As with any other infectious disease outbreak, the complexity of this virus can and has led to unwarranted [stigma](#). Nurses play a vital role in educating patients and the public to dispel common misconceptions and individuals must also seek trusted information to combat fear.⁵ The Academy commends the commitment and dedication of all who are working to keep individuals healthy, in the face of a disease with its own unique challenges.

For more information for the public and nursing professionals see resource pages from:

- [American Nurses Association](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)

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About the American Academy of Nursing

The American Academy of Nursing (Academy) serves the public and the nursing profession by advancing health policy and science through organizational excellence and effective nursing leadership. The Academy's more than 2,800 Fellows are nursing's most accomplished leaders in education, management, practice, research, and policy. They have been recognized for their extraordinary contributions to nursing and healthcare.

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⁴ Infection-Control Expert Elaine Larson on Handwashing and other Prevention Tips, March 9, 2020.

<https://www.nursing.columbia.edu/news/infection-control-expert-elaine-larson-handwashing-and-other-prevention-tips>

⁵ Buseh, Aaron G. et al. 2015. The Ebola epidemic in West Africa: Challenges, opportunities, and policy priority areas 12/16/2014. Nursing Outlook, Volume 63, Issue 1, 30 – 40.

