

SHELTERING IN PLACE, AGING

My name is Linda Milne. I am a long-time volunteer emergency preparedness and disaster response specialist.

In the face of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic and any public safety emergency, a practical action for aging adults to take is AVOIDANCE. And, the most effective avoidance strategy is to **shelter-at-home/self-quarantine.**

You and I, as aging adults, are proving to be the most likely populations to develop some **severe infections** that require hospitalization if we contract this virus. The older we are, from age 60 forward, the greater our vulnerability. Assess your vulnerability based not only upon your age, but your underlying level of health.

For EX: I am 77.5 years old, with asthma, sleep apnea, adrenal problems, low thyroid in addition to 2 decades with ME/CFS. Therefore, I am responding by assessing, each day, the footprint of my activity outside my home. I expect the time will come when I will choose to self-quarantine. I am putting plans in place for that eventuality.

That said, in a vast majority of cases, we will respond well to home-shelter/self-quarantine, home care, while maintaining phone contact with our medical care providers.

Even though it is highly unlikely you will be asked or mandated to shelter-at home, or self-quarantine, you may want to talk about it NOW as a potential family strategy. You may even determine that sheltering-at-home is a strategy you choose.

So, starting today, notice what your family uses every day, and make sure you have enough on-hand for at least 2-3 weeks. For example: Do you have sufficient food staples and ingredients to make meals you and your family enjoy. There is nothing more deflating than having to eat food you don't like when you can't go out and buy other things. It makes meals seem more like "rations".

Do you have electrolyte replacement drinks, like Powerade or Gatorade or similar beverages?

Do you have enough treats and snacks on-hand now? They are very important to boost or maintain morale.

Include the needs of your pets, food and meds as you go about taking a current inventory.

If you want to be REALLY prepared, for other emergency contingencies, stock up with at least a 2-3 week supply of safe drinking water for everyone. However, there is no data whatsoever that COVID-19 is affecting municipal water supply safety.

Do you have enough of both prescription and OTC medications? I have managed to accumulate a good stock of my prescriptions by doing the following: I refill a 30-day or 90-day script at the earliest day my insurer will accept. For 30-day it is usually near the 21st day.

When you do that over a period of a multiple months, you have created a sustainable emergency supply. I'm told narcotic refills are more strictly regulated. I put the newest meds into my emergency supplies and rotate the previous emergency meds into home use every 6 months.

We hear about 2 weeks as the period of sheltering time we should be prepared for. That works well if you live alone. But if you share your household with others that could mean your residence would end up being under quarantine for a longer period of time, if the illness infects your household members sequentially rather than concurrently. So, prepare with that in mind. For one thing, some infected people recover and then get ill again.

Do you have enough hand, dish and laundry soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizer and other personal hygiene products? What about sanitizing wipes and sprays to keep surfaces and handles, often-touched shared objects (think remote controls, phones, refrigerator/freezer doors, etc)? Paper products? toilet paper, paper towels, strong tissue.

If you feel vulnerable about being in public, this may be the time to ask other family in your locale, or close-by younger, healthy neighbors to do essential errands for you.

If you have kiddos, what would it take to keep them on the “reservation” for a couple of weeks? Is tele-schooling possible so they don’t fall behind? Are school closures occurring in your school district? Do you have enough activities to keep your kids engaged?

Now, **What about Work-Place?** Have they been talking about working from home? Would your job be in jeopardy if you elected to home shelter for a few weeks?

Another version of that: Are there discussions taking place at your work as to what conditions would prompt the temporary closing of the company? What about public-health mandated closing? Would your pay checks continue?

Mandated business closings are not likely to happen, but it is appropriate to think about and talk about in your family. Do you have a plan if any of the above were to occur?

How about family finances? Could your family manage with a temporary interruption in paychecks getting deposited? Do you have autopay for all or some of your bills? Do the accounts from which you pay your obligations

have a safety buffer of emergency funds? If not, can you transfer from savings to cover your predicted expenses?

If you were to need help through a period of pay interruption, do you have the kind of relationship with your bank or credit union manager or loan officer that you could call and arrange a temporary loan to see you through this emergency?

Having been through a variety of emergencies and major disasters, I can tell you, warm relationships are the basis of successful personal, family and community recovery. Do you need to build more and warmer relationships?

I want to end on a note of optimism. Be calm and measured as you think and plan to respond appropriately. While fear may be useful to get our attention, beyond that fear is not only unhelpful, it is damaging. Stress impacts our immune systems. **Preparation quells anxiety.**

Go about preparation thoughtfully, make purchases prudently. Do not get swept up in a preparation spending frenzy. Buy what you need now for the current situation. Do not Hoard products that everyone needs.

When calm is restored and the shelves are again fully stocked and prices inch their way down, perhaps then, you could take further preparation steps.

For up-to-date information about the Novel (new) Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Emergency Preparedness in general, see my BLOG: **Preparetorespond.blogspot.com**

Continue to follow the educational video programs that BHC is providing to you on many topics.