



# COVID-19 GUIDANCE

## How churches can support older people during the Covid-19 pandemic – a summary

This resource was published in May 2020 as part of Tearfund's *Guidance for churches on how to support older people during the Covid-19 pandemic*. The [full manual with references and further reading](#), as well as a [poster](#), are available online. Contexts and country-level scenarios vary, so please make sure the actions that you take are in line with your government's directives, and best-practice guidance, as they evolve.

### Who are the older people in your community?

People of all ages are at risk of Covid-19, but the risk of serious illness and death increases with age, due to the heightened risk of medical complications when an older person contracts the disease. Of those who have died from the disease so far, the majority have been over 60 years of age and/or have had pre-existing conditions such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Therefore, in the context of this pandemic, **those over 60 years of age** are at higher risk.

We know that this is a very diverse group. No two people over 60 years of age are the same. Some older people are very active, mobile and still working full-time, with little to distinguish them from those not considered old. Others have challenging health conditions and impairments: they may be unwell and unable to leave the house due to mobility restrictions, and may need assistance with most basic activities. Living conditions of older people also vary greatly between rural and urban residents, as well as amongst them, giving rise to different challenges and needs, and consequently requiring different responses.

Older people are unique individuals who, during this pandemic, will each benefit from kindness and support that is carefully weighed and tailored to them. Who are the older people in your community and how could you suggest that you support them?

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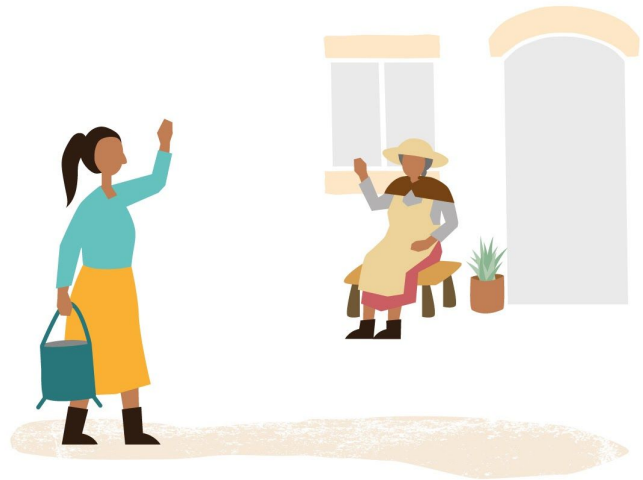
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## How can you support the older people in your community?

Churches, including individual members and church small groups, have a great potential to offer informal care and help to each other and to older people during the pandemic. Have conversations with older people in your community about their specific situations during the pandemic, and then carefully agree upon what actions to take. Some example actions are described below, though you – and those who you are helping – are encouraged to be creative. Continue to have these conversations throughout the pandemic, so that older people have a say in what assistance they receive.

### Visiting at a distance or staying in contact by phone

In line with government advice, visits may now only be possible at a distance of at least two metres. It would be beneficial for in-person visits to be replaced with frequent phone calls to older people. Some older people may not have a phone, in which case church members may be able to help by lending them phones.



### Fetching water for older people

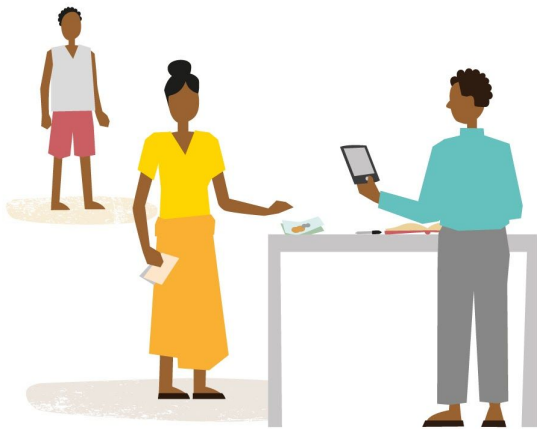
Having access to water is now particularly important because of the need for frequent handwashing and increased hygiene. Older people may need help to fetch a sufficient quantity of water for themselves, especially if the water source is at some distance from their dwelling. Good handwashing routines with soap several times a day are vitally important for everyone.

### Delivering shopping, basic supplies and medicines

It is important for older people to have sufficient stocks of basic supplies, including food and medicine, in case of or during self-isolation. This should include staple foods such as pulses, grains and cooking oil; any medicines that they take regularly; and basic medicines including painkillers such as paracetamol. Older people may need support to maintain these supplies in their homes, and it will help them to reduce their risk of infection if others shop for them and then deliver it.



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### **Sending a trusted younger person to collect pensions and other government benefits on behalf of an older person**

Pay points where older people collect pensions or other cash payments present a risk of exposure to the virus as these locations may be crowded and visited by many different people. This risk can be avoided if older individuals are able to have their pensions collected by younger church or community members whom they trust.

### **Voluntary cultivation of land and help with the sale of cultivated goods**

This will serve to safeguard the livelihoods of older people, on which they may depend for their income. However, we all need to follow government guidelines in terms of movements and work during this pandemic.



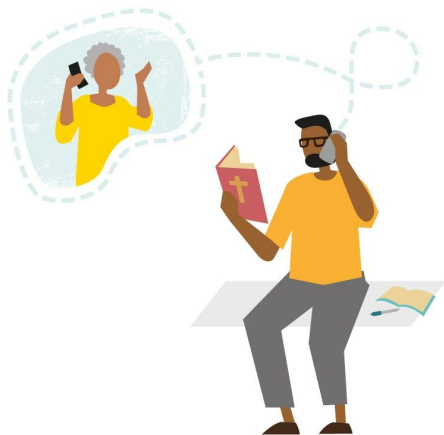
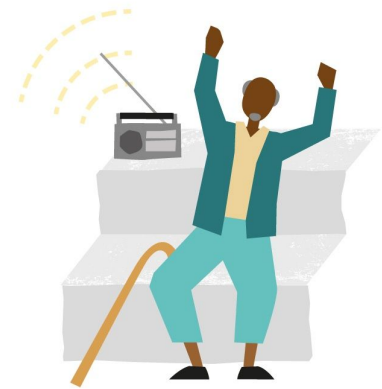
### **Making gifts of food or cooked meals and organising one-off community collections for medications**

This will be important when older people fall ill, and could be life-saving. If older individuals need it, help to cover the costs of health insurance and medication is now vital. They may also benefit from having others collect their medication from a pharmacy and deliver it to them.

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## Providing news and information

Some older people may not have a TV or radio, or access to digital resources, and therefore rely on church and community members for timely and accurate information on Covid-19. Church members can help with setting up technology or providing radios to older people so that they can listen to the news and benefit from broadcasting of religious programmes. Recorded sermons, books or audio books would also be helpful resources.



## Offering moral, emotional and spiritual support

Isolation and loneliness may exacerbate existing mental health conditions, including those who suffer from dementia. Church members could offer new forms of moral and spiritual support, such as prayer and scripture-reading over the phone.

## Speaking with and up for older people

When older people are disadvantaged or discriminated against in our communities, we can all find different ways to speak up for them, while not forgetting to speak with them regularly as well.



## What to do when someone falls ill and offering transport to hospital



If you suspect someone may have Covid-19, you should ask them to stay at home and isolate themselves from their household members as much as possible. You should also contact your local health facility and follow the advice you are given. If you are advised to take an older person to a health facility or hospital, avoid using public transport. If masks are available, both the older person and those accompanying them should wear one.

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