

# Caregiving in the Covid Era

Opinion / **Published On March 31, 2021 09:09 AM /**

Staff Consortium **March 31, 2021**

Image not found or type unknown



Even in ordinary times, unpaid family caregivers in The Virgin Islands face a daunting set of daily tasks. Oftentimes with little or no training, they may be responsible for wound care, tube feedings, dressing, managing the finances and medical bills of their loved ones, transportation and more.

Of course, these are no ordinary times.

The coronavirus pandemic has complicated the lives of family caregivers, especially those with older loved ones who are most susceptible to COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus. It has added fear, anxiety, and isolation to an already stressful situation. Here in The Virgin Islands, routines have been upended as communities cope with this disease. The Governor of the Virgin Islands, Albert Bryan, Jr., issued a stay at home order, and many assisted living homes are still closed to visitors. Even as restrictions are lifted, and vaccines have begun rolling out and are being administered, the caregivers' job is never-ending. They must find ways to cope with caring for

someone while caring for themselves during these unprecedented times. There are still variants of the virus to worry about, and caregivers must continue caring for themselves not to contract nor spread the virus while managing the balance and fulfilling this important role.

Since the outbreak of the virus, AARP has been urging family caregivers to develop a plan in case they get sick or their loved one does. Our recommendations include:

**Pull Together a Team.** Develop a list of family and friends who can perform daily caregiving tasks. If available, identify local caregiving services who may offer a respite for family and friends.

**Caregiving in the era of COVID-19?** In response to the virus, many restaurants and pharmacies have added, increased or signed up for delivery services. The federal government's Eldercare

Locator can help you find support services in your area. The new online "AARP Community Connections" enables people to enter their zip codes and find informal groups of neighbors and friends offering help right in their own communities.

**Inventory Essential Items.** Determine how much food, medication, and basic supplies your care recipient has on hand. We recommend a two-week supply of food, water, household cleaning supplies and medical materials and equipment.

**Get Prescriptions in Order.** Make sure you have a list of medications, medical contacts and important information about your loved one, such as drug allergies. If there are upcoming routine medical appointments, reschedule those or, if possible, switch to a virtual visit. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) recommends having an extra 30-day supply of essential medications on hand. Don't forget over-the-counter medications such as cough suppressants and fever reducing drugs like acetaminophen.

**Stay Connected.** Isolation is a big issue as we all follow the social distancing guidance from the CDC. However, social distancing doesn't have to lead to social disconnection. Develop a communication plan and identify times when members of the care team will check in on your loved one. Skype, Zoom and Facetime are useful digital apps that can help, but so are lower-tech options like email and telephone calling. To help fight the isolation, encourage people to send cards, letters, magazines, puzzles or other items a loved one would be happy to receive.

**Protect Yourself.** Like they tell you on an airplane, "Put your own mask on first." Now more than ever, it is important for family caregivers to take care of themselves. Follow the CDC guidelines of washing hands frequently, avoiding crowds, practice social distancing and, by all means, if you feel sick stay home. If you develop the virus, you will be of little use to those who are counting on you.

To help caregivers, AARP has a dedicated, toll-free family caregiving line for people looking after a loved one. Agents are available to take calls Monday-Friday, 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. (ET) at 877-333-5885. In The Virgin Islands caregivers can access the AARP Caregivers Guide on the AARP VI state webpage by visiting <https://states.aarp.org/virgin-islands/caregiver-resources>. VI caregivers can also contact the local VI Family Caregivers Support Program on St. Croix by calling 340-772-7100, Ext. 7056 and St. Thomas/St. John by calling 340-774-0930, Ext. 4484 or by visiting [www.dhs.gov.vi](http://www.dhs.gov.vi).

AARP also has a Facebook group where caregivers get tips from experts, share their own stories and sometimes just get a little encouragement from others in a similar situation. You can also find

answers to many of your questions online at the AARP Caregiver Resource Center [aarp.org/caregiving](https://aarp.org/caregiving). Though we would welcome your membership, our caregiving information and services are available to everyone. Our founder, Ethel Percy Andrus, said, "What we do, we do for all." That has never been more important than in the face of this coronavirus as we all pull together to find our way through it.

Submitted by AARP in the Virgin Islands.

© Viconsortium 2024