



AGING TODAY

During a Pandemic Storm



By Bob Roth, Managing Partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions

As I write this column Arizona's stay at home orders are set to expire on May 1. Will Governor Ducey open our state back up for business this Friday? Or will he extend our stay at home orders. More than likely when Governor Ducey will lift the stay at home orders when the number of new COVID-19 cases trends down for 14 straight days, and that way Arizona will enter phase one under White House guidelines.

Under phase one, vulnerable groups will still be asked to shelter in place, and non-vulnerable people will be expected to avoid groups of 10 or more people unless they can do social distancing. As far as businesses go, in phase one they will be asked to limit non-essential travel, encourage teleworking, close common areas of the workplace, and strongly consider special accommodations for employees who are considered part of a vulnerable group. Sit-down restaurants, movie theaters, sports stadiums, and churches will be allowed to reopen – but only if there is social distancing inside. Gyms will also be allowed to reopen, but in addition to having social distancing they will have to follow strict sanitation guidelines.

One of the groups that has been tragically been hit by this pandemic has been the elderly. It's been said that this virus is a killer of old people and this is now being substantiated by the numbers that are coming out of the epicenter in New York City. 88% of the deaths are a result of at least two chronic conditions like obesity, heart disease, lung disease, high blood pressure and diabetes tend to be the most common risks. These risks coincidentally are common among the elderly.

Many older adults living in nursing homes have these same significant underlying conditions. As you can imagine, the elderly are extremely vulnerable to experiencing serious complications from COVID-19. And since the beginning of this epidemic in the U.S., some of the most severe clusters of the disease have been in long-term-care centers.

"Coronavirus in a nursing home can be like fire through dry grass," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said at a press briefing. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) since mid-March has instructed nursing homes to stop admitting most visitors and non-essential personnel, in an effort to prevent the introduction of COVID-19.

With the potential for the infection quickly wreaking havoc once it takes hold in this setting, plus the inability of families to visit their relatives and check on them in person, has many wondering whether they should bring a parent or loved one back home to wait out the storm.

It has been extremely difficult for families to know how to react to the ongoing news of outbreaks in nursing homes across the country. By mid-April, for example, about a quarter of reported COVID-19 fatalities in New York State were in long-term-care facilities. Just a month after two cases of the coronavirus first appeared in a nursing home in Virginia, 45 of the 160 residents had died, according to The New York Times.

In Consumer Reports, Catherine Roberts writes that the decision can be fraught with complications. Is being on lockdown in a nursing home safer than being in an imperfectly quarantined home? Can family and friends provide everything that is needed? And what are the financial implications of bringing someone home from a nursing home?

We have many colleagues and friends that are working in long-term care facilities; nursing homes, assisted living and independent living communities. Talk about heroes, they along with their staff are on the front line and challenged by the many risks associated with this outbreak and the challenges that come along with locking down their buildings. Keeping their residents in their rooms and restricting family members from visiting comes along with its own set

of challenges.

As we get prepared to open our State to phase one under the White House guidelines, what are you going to do with your aging loved one? If you were fortunate and have been able to assist in the care for your family member as a result of being furloughed or your business was non-essential during our stay at home orders, now what do you do?

First things first, is your loved one able to stay independent enough to be living in their home or with you while you are at work? If the answer is yes, but would need some assistance with activities of daily living such as; getting dressed, bathing, meal preparation, medication reminders, fall precaution, transportation or companionship, is there another family member that can assist with this? If not a family member, a friend, neighbor? If your answer is no, then we would highly recommend that you engage a home care agency that employs their caregivers.

Know what to ask before setting up care; many families are balancing the risks of non-family members coming into their homes and the benefits of trained caregivers supporting their loved one's critical needs. While home can still be the safest place for your loved one, just know that all home care agencies are not created equal. Be sure you're working with an agency that prioritizes the health and well-being of your family and their caregivers—and has systems and protocols in place to support your safety. To give you an example, at the start of the coronavirus outbreak, Cypress HomeCare Solutions created a dedicated COVID-19 response team that's been working around the clock to update each of our policies and procedures to support safer practices for our caregivers and for our clients.

These are certainly challenging times, especially for our aging loved ones. We will get through this Pandemic Storm together just know that there are many options out there for you. If you are needing guidance, feel free to reach out to me, or feel free to reach out to the Area Agency on Aging, or Duet Partners in Health and Aging for some solutions for you to consider.

This column was published in [Lovin' Life After 50](#) and [Jewish News](#) as Cypress' monthly contribution.