COVID-19 and Individuals with Alzheimer’s

The COVID-19 pandemic creates unique and pressing challenges for long-term care (LTC) communities and residents.

- There are over 15,000 nursing homes and more than 28,000 assisted living communities in the United States.

- Individuals living in these care communities are extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 due to the community nature of these settings.

- The large majority of residents are older with underlying chronic conditions that put them at higher risk for COVID-19.

- As of March 31, 2021, 33% of reported COVID-19 deaths in the United States — more than 179,000 — were among workers and residents of nursing homes and other LTC communities.

People living with Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias represent a large proportion of LTC residents.

- At age 80, approximately 75% of people living with Alzheimer’s live in a nursing home, compared with only 4% of the general population.

- Nearly half (48%) of nursing home residents have dementia, including 59% of long stay (100 days or longer) residents.

- Among individuals in all residential care communities, including assisted living facilities, 42% have Alzheimer’s or other dementias.
The COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately affecting individuals with Alzheimer’s and other dementias.

- Individuals living with Alzheimer’s have high prevalence of conditions that are identified as potential risk factors for severe illness due to COVID-19:
  - 73% of people with Alzheimer’s and other dementias have hypertension;
  - 38% have coronary artery disease;
  - 37% have diabetes.

- In 2020 (through December 26), there were 447,382 COVID-19 hospitalizations among Medicare fee-for-service (FFS) beneficiaries. Nearly a third of them had a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s or another dementia.

- From the start of the COVID-19 pandemic through the end of 2020, there were approximately 42,000 more Alzheimer’s and dementia deaths than the previous five-year average.

In addition, COVID-19 poses unique challenges for people with dementia and their families.

- Caregivers may receive less or irregular outside assistance, adding to already-high levels of caregiver strain.

- Persons living with dementia may have an impaired ability to follow or remember instructions on social distancing and other best practices, thus increasing their risk of contracting COVID-19.

- People living with dementia may have difficulty adapting to disrupted routines. Wandering, confusion, and disorientation may increase.

- Cognitive impairment may impede communicating, especially virtually, therefore contributing to social isolation and potentially causing more rapid cognitive decline.

- Neglect, abuse, and exploitation may not be detected early if surveyors and adult protective services (APS) workers are not able to safely access long-term care communities.

Alzheimer’s Association COVID-19 Long-Term Care Policy Recommendations

To best support individuals living with Alzheimer’s and dementia during the pandemic, the Alzheimer’s Association has released a comprehensive set of long-term care policy recommendations for federal and state lawmakers. These recommendations focus on four areas: (1) testing, (2) reporting, (3) surge activation, and (4) providing support. They are designed to create a strong and decisive response to the COVID-19 crisis in all long-term care settings. It is critical that policy makers and long-term care providers act urgently to protect the most vulnerable among us. To view these recommendations, please visit alz.org/policy-covid19.