



For Immediate Release
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Public Safety Agencies Remind Seniors that Wellness Checks are Safe During COVID-19

SPRINGFIELD -- Older Illinoisans are among those most at risk for health complications related to COVID-19. The state's posture to increase safety, both of our residents and our first responders, has visually changed the landscape of our state. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), along with partners from Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA), Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal (OSFM), Illinois State Police (ISP) and the Illinois Sheriffs' Association want to remind residents of the following safety measure put in place in light of COVID-19.

Police, fire and EMS personnel conducting requested wellness checks on seniors, the disabled or any other resident will be dressed in proper personal protective equipment that has been deemed appropriate by their local jurisdiction. This change in appearance is a safety precaution. The personal protective equipment is designed to protect the resident and our first responders. It's also important to keep in mind that all first responders should be able to present proper identification.

"Seniors should not feel anxious about answering the door as proper precautions are being taken by first responders to ensure the safety of residents and themselves. If someone still feels unsafe opening the door, they can communicate through a glass door or window to let the responders know they are well. Rest assured, the person may be unrecognizable under all the protective gear, but is still the same dedicated individual in uniform that is always in their community protecting citizens," **said State Fire Marshal Matt Perez.**

"I understand that it could be unnerving to open your door to someone wearing a mask, goggles and gloves. Right now, Illinois State Police wear these to protect not only ourselves, but the public from the spread of COVID-19, especially to vulnerable populations like seniors and the disabled. If we come to your home to check on your welfare and you are nervous about answering the door, call your local police department's non-emergency number, wave out the window or shout through the door.

Just let us know you are okay. Our uniforms may look different right now, but we are still the Illinois State Police,” **said Director Brendan F. Kelly.**

“Members of the community should rest assured that your first responders are still there to keep you safe. In fact, we may be asked to come to check and make sure that you are ok,” **said Jim Kaitschuk, Executive Director of the Illinois Sheriffs’ Association.** “However, if you aren’t immediately comfortable answering the door, you should contact your non-emergency number for police to confirm.”

IDoA wants to let older Illinoisans and people with disabilities know that it is common for people to feel distressed during a crisis. Asking for and accepting help from professionals - who are following all of the proper precautions and guidelines to keep everyone safe - is a sign of strength. Many of these individuals live in the community and depend on services and supports provided in their homes or in the community to maintain their health and independence.

Although IDoA has temporarily suspended group services at adult day centers and senior centers, we have increased our one-on-one in-home services. The agency’s goal has been to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among older adults, while also increasing the ability to closely monitor their well-being. The agency has implemented guidance and tools from IDPH so that both in-home workers and the older adults they care for are safe when they do their work. The agencies in IDoA network use this as part of any protocol where face-to-face contact with an older and more vulnerable adult occurs.

“The stress on everybody is growing every day, and we want you to know you are not alone. Plan for what you can, and focus on things you can control,” **said Paula Basta, Director of IDoA.** “I encourage everyone to be mindful of our older family members, friends, or neighbors, and check in to see how they are doing. Find a creative way to communicate with them during this time and monitor their health.”

The IDoA website has many ideas and resources meant to help connect people with family and loved ones to help lower distress and feelings of social isolation. Visit www.illinois.gov/aging, click on COVID-19 What You Need to Know to find the Be Socially Engaged While Practicing Social Distancing link.

IDoA, its 13 Area Agencies on Aging, and 46 Care Coordination Units are working around the clock to ensure that the services provided - specifically the home delivered meals program that our seniors depend on - will not be interrupted during this ongoing situation. If you or an older family member, friend, or neighbor are in need of any kind of assistance, please know we are here to help you. Please visit our website at www.illinois.gov/aging or contact our Senior HelpLine at 1-800-252-8966 (hearing impaired call 888-206-1327).

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