

Self-Shielding and Social Distancing

FACT SHEET

What is “self-shielding”?

In the event of a large scale disease outbreak, bioterrorist attack, influenza pandemic or other public health emergency, your local public health department may request that you stay home for a period of days. This could help prevent or slow the spread of an illness by reducing large gatherings and limiting close contact among people. Self-shielding is similar to a “snow day” when you and your family stay home from work or school because the roads are snow or ice-covered.

What is “social distancing”?

In the event of a large scale disease outbreak, bioterrorist attack, influenza pandemic or other public health emergency, your local public health department may request that you avoid attending group events or large gatherings. This may include church services, sporting events, concerts, shopping malls and more. Listen to a credible news source during a public health emergency for specific guidance.

Why would self-shielding and social distancing be used?

These measures might be recommended by your local public health department to slow or stop the spread of disease.

What can I do now to prepare for self-shielding?

Prepare now to self-shield by stocking up on food, water and medicines. Be sure you have enough supplies to last for ten days. While self-shielding, you will be asked to stay home. This means you will not be able to go to the grocery store, eat out at restaurants or visit your local pharmacy. Everything you need should be already stored in your home.

Talk to your employer about ways to continue working. There may be an opportunity for you to do some work from home. You may be able to use sick days, vacation days or extended leave time.

Plan ahead for ways to entertain and educate children. Ask your child’s teacher how you could continue to receive worksheets and assignments for your child.

How can I stay connected to groups if I can’t attend gatherings?

Much of our mental, emotional and spiritual support comes from other people. If your local public health agency requests that people not gather in groups, such as civic groups, churches or social events, you will need to develop alternative ways to stay connected to friends, family and support groups.

The Internet offers many ways to stay in touch — exchanging photos and emails, talking in chat rooms, instant messaging. Many cell phones also have similar capability.

Plan now for ways to communicate with those you care about, without meeting face-to-face.

How will I be able to volunteer to help my community if I must maintain self-shielding and social distancing?

Volunteer coordinators locally and statewide are already planning ways in which volunteers can be utilized in this type of situation. You may be asked to place phone calls to check on people. You might be asked to enter data on your home computer. You may be asked to deliver basic necessities like food, medication and supplies to the front porch of someone in isolation or quarantine.

Volunteers are critical to any response, and your time will be absolutely needed. Check with volunteer agencies near you now to see how your skills and talents may be utilized. Learn all you can about isolation, quarantine and social distancing during pandemic influenza, bioterrorism and other public health emergencies so that you will know how to protect yourself while volunteering.