

## Transcription

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John B:

Welcome Back to another Episode Conversation Covid 19.

On this episode we are going to look at some of the emotional and physical challenges that are presented to the senior citizens in our community. to discuss this are Jennifer Johnson who is the Director of Public Health for Skagit County and Renee Corcoran who runs the Meals on Wheels service here.

Thanks for joining us.

John:

Jennifer just to start off, why are seniors at such risk? Why are they so vulnerable?

Jennifer J:

Older people are more likely to become infected. With their increased risk for underlying health conditions many older adults are already experiencing physical stress, as we age our immune system function decreases and for older adults even those that may not have a compromised immune system, their not as able to fight off viruses and bacteria as maybe younger folks. It's important to remember that the way the illness may look for a younger individual will be possibly different for an older individual. Short or temporary loss of memory or a fall could be a sign of infection so it's really important that if your feeling any different than you normally do to take that seriously even in the absence of other flu like or illness symptoms.

John B:

What can Seniors do to protect themselves? How can they be proactive about this?

Jennifer J:

Yeah, there is so much focus in the public, as there should be, for long term care facilities and nursing homes. They have the benefit of increased sanitation practices and increased strategies to kind of combat social isolation but there's many older adults living in our community that don't have that same benefit. So, I think, you know one of the most important things that a senior living in the community can do is to stay home, to practice social distancing guidelines and to not let family or neighbors in to their home. The other real important thing is to plan ahead. It is important to have non-perishable, so shelf stable food on-hand. It's important to have any supplies and medication that you need on-hand and to have a plan in place if you were to become ill, is there a daily check-in plan that you have? Or is there an

individual who can help care for you if you become ill? It's also, as I said just a little bit earlier, really important to pay attention to the physiological changes like, how are you doing, what, what is your wellness looking like? Do you have appetite changes? Sleep changes? Mood changes? Any sort of differences that you notice really need to be paid attention to. It's important to take your medications as prescribed by your doctor, reach out to your family and friends and stay connected and also continue to practice public health guidelines of washing hands for 20 seconds or longer making sure surfaces are clean and to covering coughs and sneezes, that will also help keep you healthy.

John B:

Renee this is a long-term process how, how can the elderly prepare themselves for this?

Renee C:

We need to be mindful of older adults needs and be proactive. Possibly talk with a doctor about writing a three-month prescription vs. a one-month prescription. Make sure that medications are on-hand. If you are running low ask a family member to go get your prescriptions for you. A few other options might be online or mail order pharmacies or even the drive-thru pharmacies are a good option. We want to make sure that you are not out doing your shopping so if you have a family member a friend or a neighbor or someone that could help you out, ask them to help and do your shopping for you, drop it off at your doorstep. There's also online shopping, there's curbside pick up, and at the last resort there are some retailers that have changed their hours to accommodate the high risk population. This might be a great time to learn to do some online banking, talk with your bank see if they can walk you through the setup process. And then we got to be sure that we all have plans in place in case we become ill. We need to, and that's not only just one member, it's caring for the member that becomes ill, or if you are the main caregiver in your household, make sure you have groceries, medication, resources in place to take care of yourself.

John B:

Jennifer, what should you do if you or one of your loved ones is at a senior living facility?

Jennifer J:

Yeah, individuals that live in group living or long-term care nursing homes they're definitely more vulnerable for respiratory illness. They're often close together with each other and sharing common space and sharing rooms for activities and eating and gathering. So I think if you are concerned about your family I suggest you do some research on the facility. Find out what their sanitation practices are, find out what their staffing levels are, ask them what their plans are that they may have should there be an outbreak in their facility. Do they have plans to keep sick people away from those that are not sick? I think these are reasonable questions that I really encourage all of you to ask. It's important to stay in contact with your loved one in the facility even if it is by phone. Find out how they are doing also talk to their caregiver and in an

emergency don't hesitate to reach out to their doctor even if it is a provider outside of the facility.

John B:

So one thing that's come up quite a few times is the connection between grandparents and their loved ones, what about grandkids, can they visit their grandparents?

Jennifer J:

Sadly, my response is that this should not be happening right now, and I know that's hard. It's, it's hard for everyone. I know often older adults really look forward to seeing their family, they look forward to, especially seeing their grandchildren. It's important to reach out to your family members that are older though and let them know that this is precautionary, this is important to keep them safe. I know also a lot of grandparents take care of grandchildren, they're caregivers. They take care of the grandchild while the parents are at work, and at this time with Covid this is not recommended. It is important to find alternative care for children and to make sure that we are keeping older adults safe. There is also multigenerational households, we've got to take those considerations in to account with how we interact with each other under that roof especially if there is still someone still leaving that home for essential work or essential items. Baby boomers I need to talk to you. There is a lot of information out there that's suggesting that maybe you are not as worried about contracting this as you should be, and maybe most resistant to changing your habits so I encourage you to practice social distancing, also to stay home, stay health.

John B:

And Renee what is the community doing to support seniors and in particular seniors that are vulnerable or at risk?

Renee C:

Well here in Skagit County we are one of the few remaining programs that, in the state, that still deliver a hot home delivered meal Monday-Friday. These are for seniors or adults that are over, 60 or older, that have a more difficult time preparing a meal and are homebound or have a difficult time getting out of their homes. We consider this an essential service. I know that our senior centers are closed but our Meals on Wheels program is fully operational. Right now we are helping in ways, various ways, one of them is that the congregate clients, or the folks that come in to the senior centers to eat a meal, we're sending them home with frozen meals to reheat and do that in their homes, visiting the center once to grab meals, once or twice throughout the month to grab them and bring them home. Some of these clients aren't able to get out any longer so we have set them up to become a Meals on Wheels client. Our community as always has stepped up immensely in the last couple weeks to help us out. Many of our Meals-on drivers are in that high-risk population and have had to step down from their roles for a little bit and we have had just an amazing outpouring of volunteers in our community to help us with this role and to continue with the program. We are growing by leaps and bounds and because of our community that we live in and the

volunteers and people that have stepped up we are going to continue to, to meet the needs of our community.

John B:

Jennifer in addition to the physical risks here there is a lot of emotional stress here with seniors, how do you think they are coping with that?

Jennifer J:

Yeah, being isolated for so long can definitely negatively impact wellness, especially for those individuals that are living alone. I think some helpful strategies would be, to take breaks, take breaks from news, take breaks from social media. Constantly hearing about the pandemic can be really upsetting, it's good to stay informed but it has to be balanced with making sure there are some enjoyable activities in between. It also would be helpful to take time to unwind. These are times you might want to listen to some music, watch a movie, read a book, do a hobby, that might be helpful to help kind of combat some of the stress you might be feeling from social isolation. The other thing is to try and have some sort of movement and eat healthy, even things like deep breaths can be very helpful with decreasing anxiety and stress. Reaching out to a loved one, whether that be by texting, by a phone call by FaceTime or video, that can also help, at least decrease loneliness if anything.

John B:

Renee what are some of the creative ways seniors can address the challenges of isolation?

Renee C:

Well as we know all community activities have come to a complete halt. However, our senior center staff are working hard to find creative ways to keep our guests connected and they are a great resource. They are just a phone call away, to get a nice voice on the line. We are working to create some online activities such as online exercise classes to keep the guests engaged. Last week we launched a pen pal program, bringing our population of all sorts, young, old, with cards, letters, arts and crafts, they are sending them in and we are sending them out to our Meals on Wheels clients and lot of them are returning the response, it's really great to see. So, if there is any free time out there for anyone and they want to prepare a letter or a note or a card or any kind of a craft or hobby, we would love to share that with our seniors. Just give us a call at Meals on Wheels and we can arrange that.

John B:

Jennifer, How can seniors reach out if they feel that they need help?

Jennifer J:

Seniors or any vulnerable individual that is needing to be in isolation and quarantine and you find yourself in need of assistance with getting or picking up supplies or food or knowing where to call to get such resources delivered to you call the Skagit County Resource Assistant line at area code 360-416-

1892 there's call takers there seven days a week between 10 am to 2 pm to help you.

John B:

Renee what other reliable sources of information are there for seniors? Where can they get the most up to date Covid 19 information?

Renee C:

I think first and foremost the Skagit County Public Health website, i think that is always a great resource. Our senior centers are a great place to go to get information, our senior center newsletters have a lot on them, also some fun things, some activities to do. Meals-on-Wheels, call us if you need us 360-416-1500 and there is also Northwest Regional Council Aging and Disability Resources you can reach them at 360-428-1301.

John B:

Thank so much for all the amazing work that you are doing.

John B:

So, thanks Jennifer for joining us. Renee thanks, thanks for joining us on the show, i appreciate that.