

How older people can safely collect pension payments during the COVID-19 pandemic



This document provides governments, HelpAge International staff, network members and partners with key messages to advocate for the effective inclusion of older people in preparedness planning and ongoing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of pension payments.

COVID-19 and pension payments

COVID-19, also known as coronavirus, is a new respiratory disease that poses a significant risk to older people. Due to their reduced immunity and the increased likelihood of existing chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer, the infection can lead to severe complications and even death.

It is vital older people take precautions to minimise their risk of infection. Pay points where older people collect pensions or other cash payments pose a significant risk of exposure to the virus as these locations may be crowded and visited by many different people who could have the infection.

Pension payment agencies need to collaborate with community-level leadership, government health departments and other services and commercial partners to develop an appropriate and coordinated response.

This requires consultation with older people, who can provide input on how to reach older people across different contexts, and in line with basic human rights. Key messages for older people when collecting pensions payments during the COVID-19 pandemic

Precautions for pension collection

Pension pay points can be crowded places, with lots of people coming and going. If they have COVID-19, they can easily spread the infection to others. You need to protect yourself from infection when visiting these sites.

- If you can walk or drive, rather than using public transport, to collect your pension, please do. Busy buses or trains are places where the virus can easily transmit from person to person.
- If using public transport, avoid touching surfaces, your face and others as much as possible. Wash your hands with soap and water as soon as possible afterwards.
- Wash your hands for 20 seconds using soap before and after visiting a pension pay point, retailer or ATM, and after handling any cash you receive.
- You do not need fresh water or special soap to wash your hands – pre-used water and ordinary soap are fine. If soap and water are not available, you can use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Stand at least two metres (six feet) apart from other people at pension pay points and any place where people are gathered.
- If you sneeze or cough, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue and dispose of it in a rubbish bin afterwards. If you have no tissue, then sneeze into your elbow and wash your hands as soon as possible afterwards.
- If you are feeling unwell, have a fever, dry cough or shortness of breath, plan for someone you trust to collect your pension on your behalf. Self-isolate by remaining at home and avoid contact with any person. Avoid sharing utensils with others and make sure your home is cleaned thoroughly, particularly areas you touch regularly.
- Consider avoiding shopping on the first few days after payment. Shops might be busier than usual, and you will risk exposing yourself in these settings. Ask someone you trust to do your shopping for you.

Please remember: COVID-19 is a serious illness, but there are things we can all do to protect ourselves and others. Taking sensible precautions is important but there is no need to panic.

Contacts of authors

- **Gabrielle Kelly**, Samson Institute for Ageing Research, Senior Researcher (gkelly@sifar.org.za)
- **Peter Lloyd-Sherlock**, University of East Anglia, Professor of Social Policy and International Development (P.Lloyd-sherlock@uea.ac.uk)
- **Florian Juergens**, HelpAge international, Global Advisor on Social Protection (florian.juergens@helpage.org)

HelpAge International information hub on COVID-19 and older people:

- www.helpage.org/what-we-do/coronavirus-covid19/

WHO's global advice on COVID-19:

- www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses
- www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public