

Living 50 Plus

News and Information for Nash County Seniors

# Protect yourself from coronavirus fraud

Restrictions implemented to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 have saved untold numbers of lives. The world has adjusted to such restrictions, and many parts of the world have relaxed measures as case numbers have declined.

As communities begin returning to some semblance of normalcy, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has warned people against letting their guard down. While many of those warnings pertain to the importance of continuing to practice social distancing as economies reopen, advisories also include notices about fraud schemes related to COVID-19.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General has advised the general public about scams involving Medicare fraud. Such schemes are targeting Medicare beneficiaries in an assortment of ways, including through text messages, social media, telemarketing calls, and even door-to-door visits. When perpetrating such frauds, scammers seek beneficiaries' personal information, which they then use to fraudulently bill federal health care programs, potentially leaving their victims on the hook for costly unapproved tests related to COVID-19.

The CDC notes the importance of being aware of such schemes. Awareness can help consumers avoid being victimized by scammers, and the following are some additional measures people can take to protect themselves from COVID-19-related fraud.

- Do not share personal account information. Scammers need their victims' personal information to perpetrate their fraudulent schemes. The CDC cautions beneficiaries to be suspicious of unsolicited requests for their Medicare or Medicaid numbers.
- Do not take callers or visitors at face value. Unsolicited callers or visitors requesting Medicare or Medicaid information should be met with extreme caution.

Be suspicious of any unexpected calls or visitors offering COVID-19 tests or supplies. Compromised personal information may be used in other fraud schemes.

- Never click on links in emails or text messages. Do not respond to, or open hyperlinks in, text messages or emails about COVID-19 from unknown individuals.
- Ignore offers or advertisements for COVID-19 testing or treatments on social media sites. Offers or ads for testing are one of the ways scammers are accessing personal information. Only a physician or other trusted healthcare provider should assess your condition and approve any requests for COVID-19 testing.

The COVID-19 outbreak has made it easy for criminals to exploit consumers concerned about their health. Consumers who suspect COVID-19 fraud can contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at (866) 720-5721 or visit [justice.gov/DisasterComplaint](https://www.justice.gov/DisasterComplaint) Form to file a complaint.

# Safety first before mixing drugs

Billions of people across the globe take medications each day. Certain medications can help people with potentially debilitating or even deadly conditions live normal lives, while others can help people overcome relatively minor issues like muscle aches or seasonal allergies.

The American Heart Association notes that mixing drugs can produce unexpected side effects. This can make it dangerous for people already on prescription medications to use over-the-counter drugs for issues like headache or seasonal allergies. Understanding the potential interactions between their prescriptions and common prescription and over-the-counter medications can help people stay safe.

- Antihistamines: Antihistamines are widely used to alleviate symptoms of the common cold or seasonal allergies, such as runny nose, itchy eyes and sneezing. The AHA notes that, when taken along with blood pressure medication, antihistamines can contribute to an accelerated heart rate and cause blood pressure to spike. The AHA also cautions people taking sedatives, tranquilizers or prescriptions to treat high blood pressure or depression to consult their physicians before taking antihistamines.
- Bronchodilators: Bronchodilators relax and open the airways in the lungs and are used to treat various lung conditions, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD. These drugs make it easier to breathe and are available via prescriptions. But patients with heart disease, high blood pressure, thyroid disease, and/or diabetes should discuss the potential interactions between bronchodilators and other medications they may be taking with their physicians.
- Cordarone: According to Drugs.com, Cordarone is used to treat potentially deadly abnormal heartbeats. Cordarone can cause severe problems that affect the lungs, thyroid or liver, and can be dangerous when combined with other drugs. For example, the AHA notes that patients who take more than 20 milligrams of Zocor, a drug used to lower "bad" cholesterol and potentially to lower the risk of stroke, heart attack and other conditions, while also taking Cordarone are at risk of developing rhabdomyolysis. Rhabdomyolysis is a condition marked by the breakdown of muscle tissue that can lead to kidney failure or death. The AHA also says that Cordarone can inhibit or reduce the effects of the blood thinner Coumadin.
- Nicotine replacement products: People taking prescriptions for depression or asthma should consult their physicians before taking any nicotine replacement products. The Federal Drug Administration notes that doctors may want to change dosages of patients' current medications before recommending they take any nicotine replacement products. The FDA also advises people to speak with their physicians before trying these products if they have diabetes, heart disease, asthma or stomach ulcers; have had a recent heart attack; have high blood pressure but do not take any medication for it; or have a history of irregular heartbeat.

Drug interactions can complicate treatment of various conditions. People currently on medication are urged to speak with their physicians before taking any new medicines, including over-the-counter drugs.



# When communication becomes difficult

Trouble communicating with others can be a symptom of various disorders. Difficulty conveying words or emotions can be a condition of autism spectrum disorder, but quite frequently it occurs when a neurological injury affects the portion of the brain responsible for language.

The National Aphasia Association states that aphasia is an impairment of language that affects the comprehension or the production of speech as well as the ability to read and write. Aphasia results from an injury to the brain, including head trauma, brain tumors, infections, and stroke.

The Cleveland Clinic notes a person with aphasia may experience difficulty speaking, writing, reading, and understanding language. Impairments can range from mild to very severe (nearly impossible to communicate). While aphasia may only affect one area of communication, usually limitations occur across many areas.

One of the more common symptoms of aphasia is word-finding issues. This can be characterized by challenges remembering the names of people, events or things. Sometimes an individual may not be able to think of the word he or she wants to say. In other instances, that person may say the wrong word entirely, such as using "rope" for the word "ball." The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association also states that it is common for someone with aphasia to switch sounds in words, like "wish-dasher" for "dishwasher." Often sentences are difficult to come by, and single words may be easier.

Trouble communicating also extends to a person with aphasia having challenges understanding what others are saying, particularly when they speak fast or in long sentences. The situation may be exacerbated when it is noisy or a person is in a group setting.

Aphasia can affect anyone. However, it is more common in those who are middle-aged and older. The NAA says roughly 180,000 people are diagnosed with aphasia each year. Even though brain injury is a primary cause of aphasia, it also can create other language-related issues, such as weakness in the muscles that control the face or mouth or an inability to move the lips or tongue in the right way to make sounds.

People with aphasia can benefit from working with a speech-language pathologist as early as possible. This professional can present many strategies to help manage deficits or potentially return some measure of communication. Augmentative and alternative communication, such as using images or a computer to tell what a person wants, may be options in more severe cases of aphasia.

Aphasia affects many people and can rob them of the ability to communicate effectively without intervention.



Aphasia can make it difficult for people to speak, read and write.

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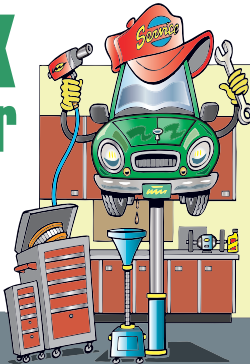
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Recommended vaccines for adults

Newborn babies endure quite a bit in the first few days and months of their lives. Routine immunizations help newborns overcome these obstacles, and as newborns get old they receive vaccines to prevent measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis, and chicken pox.

A common misconception suggests that vaccines are only for the young. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that the protection provided by some childhood vaccines can wear off. In addition, some people may be at risk for certain vaccine-preventable diseases due to lifestyle, existing health conditions and age. As a result, it's important for adults to make sure their vaccines are up-to-date.

Those who are unsure of their vaccine status should discuss their health history with their doctors. In the meantime, adults should know that the following vaccines are recommended for people of various ages.

- **Influenza:** An annual flu shot is highly recommended. Doctors and health officials indicate that getting the flu vaccine is the single most effective way to prevent seasonal flu or reduce the duration and severity of the illness should it be contracted.
- **Tdap:** This vaccine contains strains of tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough). All three are implicated in serious illnesses or death,

according to WebMD. Just about every person, young and old, should receive the Tdap vaccine. The CDC says that every adult should get the Tdap vaccine once if they did not receive it as an adolescent. Then a Td booster shot every 10 years is sufficient.

- **Shingles:** People who have been exposed to varicella (chicken pox) in their youth are at risk for shingles as they grow older. The CDC says nearly one out of three people in the United States will develop shingles in their lifetime. A shingles vaccine can protect against shingles and complications from the disease. Adults who are 50 and older should get the vaccine, which is administered in two doses.
- **Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPSV23):** This vaccine protects against serious pneumococcal diseases, including meningitis and bloodstream infections. It is recommended for all adults age 65 and older.
- **Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV 13):** This protects against serious pneumococcal disease and pneumonia. Adults 65 years or older who have never received a dose of PCV13 should discuss PCV13 with their physicians.

Vaccines protect the very young from various diseases, but there are many vaccines that are still vital to health in adulthood.

Colorectal cancer screenings recommended those over 50

As the human body ages, screening for various conditions and diseases may need to occur more frequently. Routine doctor visits may not be a part of most people's image of the perfect retirement, but such check-ups can save lives and make one's golden years much more enjoyable.

The World Health Organization notes that cancer is the leading cause of death across the globe and that colorectal cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in the world. A 2017 study published in the journal Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention concluded that risk factor modification, screening and treatment all have considerable potential to reduce colorectal cancer mortality by 2030.

The U.S. National Library of Medicine recommends that men and women between the ages of 50 and 75 be screened for colorectal cancer every year. Doctors screen for colorectal cancer in various ways, and many of these screenings need not be conducted annually. However, the USNLM recommends that all men and women between the ages of 50 and 75 receive a fecal occult blood, or stool-based, test every year. In addition, men and women should receive a fecal immunochemical, or FIT, test every year. The FIT is a simple test that adults can conduct in the privacy of their own homes.

Doctors may recommend additional screenings for colorectal cancer. Upon making such recommendations, doctors will discuss

patients' screening options, which include an assortment of tests, and then recommend which test might be best for the patient. The USNLM recommends men and women receive stool DNA tests every three years, flexible sigmoidoscopy tests every five years and double contrast barium enemas every five years. Virtual colonoscopies (once every five years) and colonoscopies (once every 10 years) also may be recommended.

Colorectal cancer claims hundreds of thousands of lives across the globe every year. Men and women over 50 can reduce their risk of falling victim to colorectal cancer by scheduling annual screenings.



Elder care resources

People want to grow old gracefully and maintain their independence as long as possible. There are many decisions to make as well as information to wade through to ensure needs are met and proper care is received through one's golden years. Individuals, caregivers and families may find that a few helping hands along the way can be invaluable.

Numerous elder care resources are available for those who don't know where to look. Start by researching the National Council on Aging (www.ncoa.org). This is a national leader and trusted association that helps people age 60 and older. The council works with nonprofit organizations, governments and businesses to organize programs and services at the community level. This is a good place to find senior programs that can help with healthy aging — emotionally, physically and financially.

AARP (www.aarp.org) is yet another organization dedicated to helping seniors. The comprehensive AARP website offers a host of information on everything from senior discounts to products to health and other information specific to seniors. The AARP also has an affiliated charity that works to help low-income seniors procure life's necessities.

At the local level in the United States, the federal government has mandated Area Agency on Aging (www.n4a.org) facilities in every county/city. These agencies can provide information on service programs available to the seniors in the area, as well as financial resources. These facilities give seniors access to volunteers who can take seniors around by car, and some provide meals-on-wheels services.

The Administration for Community Living (www.acl.org) was established to help older adults and people of all ages with disabilities live where they choose. A network of community-based organizations helps millions of people age in place.

Military veterans or those who are/were married to a veteran may be eligible for various benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (www.va.gov). The VA offers health care services, disability compensation, burial benefits, and much more.

Seniors have many different resources at their disposal that can help answer questions or provide services when the need arises.

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