

Helpful tips for family caregivers

Creating a pandemic pod



Social isolation takes a toll on our emotional well-being, especially for older adults. Because the herd immunity associated with COVID-19 vaccines is still a ways off, you and the person you care for must continue to be vigilant. Unless local health officials have declared a no-gathering lockdown, you might consider a "pandemic pod."

Members of a pod share a commitment to safety. They agree to follow the same strict limitations while dealing with others—creating a shell—so that time spent within the pod can be more relaxed (more time together indoors, possibly without masks or distancing). It's up to each pod to decide what their rules are.

Who to consider for your pod? Keep it small. Ideally, no more than five to ten people across no more than three households. People you or your loved one usually connect with are good candidates—family and neighbors—but not necessarily. Do all of you agree about what is and isn't safe? Is your public exposure roughly the same? Are all of you equal in your ability to follow rules? You are only as secure as the podmate with the riskiest behavior.

Deciding to become a pod. Recognize that joining together as a pod requires complete honesty and trust. Each of you will need to share information about your medical risks (age, high-risk conditions) and daily details about your exposure to others. How many people do you interact with in person on the average weekday? Weekend? How many of those are children or teens? What percentage of time spent with others is indoors? Involves social distancing of six feet or more? What percentage of people encountered outside the pod are wearing masks? How often does each podmate wear a mask outside the home?

Is there honestly a fit? It may be that there is a mismatch between exposure level and the risk tolerance of some people in the group. If someone in the group has high exposure (for instance, drives a bus) *and* someone else in the group is high risk (older than age 65 or has a high-risk condition—is a smoker or obese, or has diabetes, cancer, or a heart, lung, or kidney condition), you might want to reconsider. Perhaps you need a different collection of podmates. While it may be awkward, it's not a personal judgment if the situation is too risky and you decide to find another pod. You are simply looking out for your loved one's safety.

More than one pod? No. Forming a pod is a bit like going steady. It's an exclusive social relationship that lets you be more relaxed within a group. The pod is like an expanded household in which social contact with others outside the pod is strictly limited. You can quit one pod and join or assemble another. However, you will need to go through the whole process of agreeing on rules with the new group.

There are no official guidelines for pods. Complete social abstinence (lockdown) is the *only* surefire protection. But following social recommendations by the CDC and your local health department is a good baseline as you determine what feels "safe enough."

Want help with COVID strategies? Give us a call at 800-838-9800 (toll-free).



"Mom was going downhill with loneliness, so we set up a pod with the neighbors across the street. Because we all agree about safety, it's worked out very well!"

**800-838-9800
(TOLL-FREE)**

Transitions supports older adults and their families in Delaware, and Delaware and Chester Counties in PA.

Give us a call at 800-838-9800 (toll-free) to find out how we can support you.

Reaching consensus on pod rules



As a pod, *all* of you need to agree upon rules *all* of you will follow *all* the time.

What is safe? Everyone has a surprisingly different definition of “safety.” Because a pod is rules based, it’s important you understand each other’s risk tolerance. And since older adults are at greatest risk—one in ten older than age 70 is likely to die if they get COVID—podmates need to agree to fairly stringent rules.

A podmate can become infected, show no symptoms, and still infect other podmates.

What to avoid. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has determined that spending more than fifteen minutes total over the course of a day within six feet of persons with COVID (even with no symptoms) is enough to become infected and infectious. Also, if they sneeze or cough on you, or if you eat with the same utensils. Indoor time is riskier than outdoor time.

Consider these questions as you decide on rules:

When with others outside the pod:

- *Can everyone agree to wear masks at all times?*
- *What is the maximum time to be spent indoors with non-podmates per day? Is there a difference between a windowless office space and a large, well-ventilated store?*
- *What if others in the indoor setting are not wearing masks (in a restaurant or on public transportation)?*
- *What if the room is crowded or it’s not easy to maintain a six-foot distance? (Masks do not replace the need for social distancing.)*
- *What about traveling? By car? Taxi or ride sharing? Train or bus? Plane?*
- *Any other activities by podmates that might raise concerns: In-person doctor visits? Hospitalizations? Hair salons? The gym?*

Write down the rules you have all agreed to and give everyone a copy.

When pod safety is breached

Everyone does the best they can. And still things happen. As part of your rules discussion, you will want to agree on quarantine procedures in the case of a breach.

What is a quarantine? Think of it as a fresh wipe or reset. This is a period when an individual stays secluded from others until it’s clear they are not infected or infectious. Quarantine is actually something for all podmates to practice before you start meeting with relaxed restrictions.

CDC guidelines for quarantine:

- Stay at home. This requires planning so you don’t need to go out for food or other errands
- Monitor for symptoms daily (fever over 100.4°, cough, shortness of breath)
- Any other quarantine recommendations from your local health department
- Assuming no symptoms, when the quarantine is lifted, continue monitoring daily for another fourteen days
- If symptoms occur at any time, contact your health care provider and follow their recommendations

Length of quarantine if no symptoms:

- Seven full days if a test taken on Day 5 comes back negative (5%–12% chance of still being infected or infectious)
- Ten full days if without testing (1%–10% chance of still being infected or infectious)
- Fourteen days is the gold standard, no test needed

Podmates agree to complete transparency. If there has been a breach, no matter the circumstances, you must all agree to tell each other immediately. The infected person (and anyone who had contact with them after the incident) should go into quarantine. Shaming and blaming discourages honesty. Best to express concern for your podmate and simply follow the quarantine procedures agreed upon as a group at the beginning.

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