

# 6 ways to help others during the coronavirus outbreak — ‘Everyone is a responder in this crisis’

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Some groups will feel this public health crisis more than others, including older people, workers who can't call in sick, and those who can't pay for quality health care or don't have access to it



*Americans stockpiling food has been so intense that some food banks have seen big decreases in donations from retail grocery stores, said Kathryn Strickland of Feeding America, a network of 200 food banks nationwide.*

MIGUEL MEDINA/AFP via Getty Images

The novel coronavirus is an unfamiliar foe that's fast reshaping daily routines as schools close, employees work from home (if they have that luxury), and shared pleasures such as sports games and movie theaters go dark.

The upheaval has many people rushing to meet their own needs by stocking up on supplies for potential quarantines. But certain groups will feel this public health crisis more than others, including older people, workers who can't call in sick, and people who either can't pay for quality health care or simply don't have access to it.

"The most vulnerable among us will be hit the hardest and take the longest to recover," said Regine A. Webster, vice president of the Center for Disaster Philanthropy. "Remember there will be physical health, mental health and economic impacts of the pandemic long after the initial outbreak."

The most important action individuals can take is to stop the spread of the virus by washing their hands correctly, practicing "social distancing," and quarantining themselves if they are sick, public health officials say.

Beyond those measures, here are some other steps for directing resources where they're needed most.

## How to help others during the coronavirus pandemic

*First, wash your hands properly and practice social distancing*

Then:

- Get medical supplies shipped to where they're needed most
- Volunteer with Meals on Wheels
- Donate money to reputable nonprofits
- Support your local food bank
- Give blood
- Help people experiencing homelessness

Source: MarketWatch reporting

## Get medical supplies shipped to where they're needed most

The humanitarian relief group Direct Relief has been delivering personal protective equipment including masks, gloves and gowns to China since January. Recently, it shipped oxygen concentrators to China, said Direct Relief spokesman Tony Morain. They're devices that coronavirus patients can use to help them breathe at home, rather than being hooked up to a ventilator at a hospital. They're needed because hospital beds are in short supply in China, Morain said.

China is about six weeks ahead of where the U.S. is, Morain said. While communal transmission has slowed, there are still recovering coronavirus patients who need help breathing. Direct Relief recently bought about 500 oxygen concentrators for U.S. patients, and it's committed \$2 million to help nonprofit community health centers in the U.S. prepare for the outbreak.

"Everyone is a responder in this crisis, in one way or another, whether it's protecting their family or themselves," Morain said. "In the worst of times, we see the best of people."

## Volunteer with Meals on Wheels

Meals on Wheels, which delivers meals to older people who can't leave their homes, says it's anticipating increased demand during the outbreak. Seniors are especially susceptible to the novel coronavirus, and health officials are recommending people over age 60 to take extra precautions, which can include staying home. However, that isolation [can have damaging effects long term](#), and Meals on Wheels provides critical social interaction for many of its clients.

Some Meals on Wheels chapters are [looking for healthy volunteers](#) who can be on call to make deliveries during the coronavirus outbreak. Many chapters also keep in touch with seniors at a distance [through "telephone reassurance" programs](#). To volunteer in your area, find your local Meals on Wheels provider [here](#).

## Donate money to a reputable nonprofit

Philanthropists and corporations worldwide have poured about \$1.3 billion into addressing the novel coronavirus crisis so far, according to the nonprofit research group [Candid](#). The largest donors in the U.S. have been the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has committed up to \$105 million from Microsoft [MSFT, -4.10%](#) co-founder Bill Gates and his wife.

The spread of the coronavirus ended the 11-year bull market and has already resulted in layoffs in some industries. But you don't have to be a billionaire to make a difference. The charity rating sites [Charity Navigator](#) and [CharityWatch](#) have lists of vetted charities working around the world to address the outbreak, including Lutheran World Relief, Heart to Heart International, and Doctors Without Borders, which is working to evacuate refugee camps in Greece at risk of becoming outbreak zones. The [Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#) suggests donating to groups focused on "WASH" — water, sanitation and hygiene.

## Support your local food bank

Americans are emptying stores shelves of non-perishables as they brace for the possibility of having to self-isolate. The stockpiling has been so intense that some food banks have seen significant decreases in donations from retail grocery stores, said Kathryn Strickland, chief network officer at Feeding America, a network of 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries and meal programs nationwide. Feeding America has set up [a COVID-19 response fund](#), and is working to build an inventory of emergency food boxes to distribute to food banks as the need arises.

While volunteering in person at a food bank may not be advised as people practice social distancing, Strickland recommends calling [one in your area](#) to see what their needs are.

"There are still ways you can support the food bank while not physically at the food bank — you can donate online, raise awareness by sharing food bank messaging on social media, and advocate for support at the federal level," Strickland said.

## Donate blood

The American Red Cross is urging healthy people who are feeling well to donate blood or platelets.

**See also:** [Is donating blood safe? Do blood drives test for coronavirus?](#)

"As fears of the coronavirus rise, low donor participation could harm blood availability at hospitals, and the last thing a patient should worry about is whether lifesaving blood will be on the shelf when they need it most," said Chris Hrouda, president of Red Cross Blood Services. There's no evidence that this novel coronavirus can be transmitted through blood transfusions, according to the Red Cross. Find a donation site or blood drive near you [here](#).

## Help people experiencing homelessness

People without homes face a significant risk from the novel coronavirus, said Rick Brown, spokesman for the National Health Care for the Homeless Council. They have poorer health in general, often suffer from sleep deprivation, and often have preexisting conditions that leave them with weakened immune systems, he said. What's more, they're less likely to be insured.

"Because of this, they are at significant risk — much more so than they actually are to pass COVID-19 to people with healthy immune systems, like many people with housing," Brown said.

He recommended contacting your local homeless shelters and homeless service organizations to find out what they need most now. The National Coalition for the Homeless [has called for cities to provide hand-washing stations](#) for people in homeless encampments during the pandemic, and recommended that all coronavirus testing and treatment be free for all.

"This is bigger than any one person or any one person's ability to help — it's really about a failure of policy," Brown said. "This crisis illustrates the weaknesses of our health-care and housing systems."