

# Macon County Health Department

## February 2021 – March 2021

### Caregiver Advisory Newsletter



## COVID-19 Vaccinations



Macon County has officially moved into Phase 1b of the COVID-19 Mass Vaccination Plan. In Phase 1a, individuals in long-term facilities such as skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities and state-run veterans' homes were eligible for the vaccination. Phase 1b includes anyone 65 and older. You are not eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine if you have tested positive for COVID-19, received monoclonal antibody, or convalescent plasma treatment in the last 90 days. Those receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, will need 2 doses for it to be effective. If you have original Medicare, Medicare covers the vaccine at no cost to you.

The Macon County Health Department (MCHD) will release information regarding how eligible persons can schedule an appointment through media outlets and our Facebook page when vaccination appointments are available. The MCHD, along with other community partners, will also hold clinics on a regular basis and announce these clinics as they plan them. The vaccine administration will take place over the course of several months as the MCHD continues to work towards vaccinating every eligible person who wishes to receive it.

Please be aware of scams and do not share your personal or financial information if someone calls, texts, or emails you promising access to the vaccine for a fee.

For questions regarding the vaccines, please visit [www.idph.illinois.gov/covid19/vaccine-faq](http://www.idph.illinois.gov/covid19/vaccine-faq)

## Call4Calm

The Illinois Department of Human Services' Mental Health Division has launched a free-of-charge emotional support text line, Call4Calm, for Illinois residents experiencing stress and mental health issues related to COVID-19. Individuals who would like to speak with a mental health professional can text "TALK" to 5-5-2-0-2-0 for English, or "HABLAR" to the same number for Spanish. Call4Calm is free to use and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Individuals seeking assistance will remain anonymous and will provide only their first name and zip code. Once a resident sends a text to the hotline, within 24 hours they will receive a call from a counselor employed by a local community health center to provide support.

## CALL 4 CALM

FREE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT TEXT  
LINE WHERE YOU CAN SPEAK  
WITH A MENTAL HEALTH  
PROFESSIONAL.

TEXT "TALK" TO 552020  
OR  
TEXT "HABLAR" TO 552020  
(FOR SERVICE IN SPANISH)

# Why Do People With Dementia Wander?

For people with dementia, wandering is a way they can self-medicate due to their anxiety and sense of displacement. That feeling of displacement drives them to walk out of the front door and straight down the road, going forward endlessly. It is a feeling that instigates the walking and it is dementia that keeps it going. Once people have begun walking, they usually will not ask for help or directions and they tend to go straight ahead. Boredom and restlessness can also drive people out of their front doors to find, presumably, some kind of variety.

The desire in the dementia wanderer is often simply wanting to go somewhere, anywhere but where they are. Think about the average person who has dementia. They've lost their previous life and have nothing to replace it. Caregivers can be so busy that those they care for are often left in a state of limbo. They can be left doing nothing, having nothing and unable to figure out for themselves what to do. Everyone else can go walking at any time, except for people with dementia. We even label their walking as wandering. That's our caregiver jargon, which implies we don't want them to do it. It's dangerous for them and worrisome for us. If we don't help find alternatives, however, they will walk out when we're not looking.

## How do we bring satisfaction to the wanderer?

**An actual walking program is a great idea!** Taking your loved one for a walk, weather permitting, can help relieve stress and boredom. Plus it is good exercise. Give yourself a break by asking a family member, friend, or church member to accompany your loved one on a walk. When planning a walking program, it is important to set the boundaries in time and distance, train the walker who'll go with your loved one, and explain dementia.

**Create an activity plan.** Some activities have proven to be particularly helpful for those with dementia, such as exercise, puzzles, outdoor activities, arts and crafts, and music. Including your loved one in daily activities such as cooking, baking, sorting and folding the laundry, sweeping the floor, and sorting recycling can bring a sense of being useful and helpful. In doing so, as the caregiver, we commit to letting go of our standards of perfection. Keep in mind that everyone enjoys different activities, and you should try the activities that best fit your loved one's personality, needs, and situation.

**A driving program.** Most people with dementia love a ride in the car. It can be the most active passive entertainment for some living with dementia. For added pleasure, have the final destination be somewhere involving food.

**The company of others who also have dementia is often very comforting!** Look for a good daytime activity program near you. How do you know it's good? See if people are having a good time, talking like friends, and enjoying the quality of the connection. Dementia is often a lonely condition. The actual activity almost doesn't matter as long as it clearly connects people by the heart.

**Adopt a pet friend.** Adopting older pets that seldom get adopted is great for individuals with dementia. Companionship, reducing anxiety and agitation, an excuse to get exercise, and improving interactions and socialization are just some of the benefits of having a pet in the home. There are some considerations to remember when it comes to bringing a pet home though. Pets can be tripping hazards for the elderly, and if the person with dementia is unable to care for the pet, someone else must be sure to do so.

The goal of all this is to tire out your loved one so that restless dissatisfaction does not speak so loudly to them.

## How to Protect Your Loved Ones from Wandering?

A family member's worst nightmare is when their loved one or care recipient wanders off or goes missing. Thoughts can turn to the worst-case scenario, and until the wanderer is returned safe and sound, care teams, police, local firefighters, EMTs and the community are on heightened alert.

No one wants their loved one to experience the frightening scenario of being lost and having no one by their side to help them. Today, as COVID-19 cases are still being tracked across the U.S., the risk of wandering without any protective masks or an understanding of social distancing makes it even more serious.

There are many actions that can be taken once a care recipient is found to be missing, but there are also ways to prevent a loved one from wandering off without anyone noticing in the first place.

- Install slide bolts at the top or bottom of doors.
- Hang bells on the door-handles.
- Place warning chimes on doors.
- Camouflage doorknobs by covering them with cloth of the same color as the doors or consider childproof knobs, too.
- Camouflage doors by painting them the same shade as surrounding walls.
- Create a two-foot black threshold in front of doors with paint or tape. (A rug might do the job, too.) This creates the illusion of a gap or hole that a person with limited visual spatial abilities may be reluctant to cross.

In addition to these preventive measures, you'll want to take some additional precautions so you're prepared if wandering does occur.

- Keep a recent, close-up photograph available, both print and digital. This is very helpful should the worst occur and your loved one has left their home unexpectedly.
- Keep a written list of places that they might go, such as church or a favorite restaurant, job site, or previous home. The Alzheimer's Association notes that wanderers generally follows the direction of their dominant hand. To the right if right-handed, or the left if left-handed.
- Post emergency numbers in a handy spot.
- Buy identification jewelry engraved with "memory impaired" and the person's name, address, and phone number. You might also consider Safe Return programs that offer a bracelet or pendant with a toll-free emergency response number that you, or anyone who finds the wanderer, can call 24 hours a day. Response line personnel alert police and a personal contact list.
- A high-tech option uses GPS and cell towers to provide an approximate location for a person who might wander. Depending on the level of need, families might request an alert if the person wearing the locator device leaves a specified zone, or they might tap into the system only in case of emergency.

Adapted from [caregiving.com](http://caregiving.com) and [health.harvard.edu](http://health.harvard.edu)

## Decatur Caretrak Program

The CARETRAK Program was designed to assist in locating missing adults who have dementia or children with developmental disorders that may prohibit them from communicating personal information, such as who they are, or where they live. The CARETRAK Program requires the client to wear a bracelet or anklet at all times. Each client is assigned a police officer who visits with the client and their family monthly to change the battery in the bracelet and note any changes in the client's condition. Caretrak works by using radio waves emitted from a bracelet to track the patient if they become lost.

To be eligible for the program, an applicant's caregiver must submit an application documenting the need for the program and they must have a referral from their physician. The program will only accept applicants residing with their caregivers, in residential settings. The Decatur CARETRAK Program Board reviews the CARETRAK applications and determines suitability for the program, based on the applicant. If approved, there is no cost to participate in the program.

### Contact us at:

Decatur Police Department  
707 W Southside Dr  
Decatur, IL 62521  
Ph# 217-424-2743  
[www.decaturil.gov](http://www.decaturil.gov)



# Alzheimer's Association Safe Return Program

The Alzheimer's Association, in collaboration with MedicAlert Foundation, provides membership plans with 24/7 Wandering Support. Members are required to purchase an ID bracelet or accessory, and an Advantage or Advantage Plus membership to participate in the Wandering Support program.

Products can be purchased through MedicAlert, including ID bracelets, necklaces and other accessories for men and women. The cost for an ID bracelet or another product is dependent upon the style selected. All IDs are custom engraved with the member's medical information and unique MedicAlert member number. A MedicAlert membership plan with Wandering Support helps first responders and families reconnect with individuals living with dementia who experience a medical emergency or have wandered.

24/7 emergency response. When an incident call comes in, MedicAlert's Emergency Response Team collects all the relevant information on the missing or found person. For missing incidents, a missing person report is generated and distributed to local police, EMS and other authorities as appropriate. MedicAlert continues to follow up on the case until it is resolved.

Comprehensive health profile. The member's profile contains medical conditions, allergies, medications taken, past surgical history, and other important information. In an emergency, the MedicAlert Emergency Response Team relays this information to first responders to enable fast, accurate care.

Family notification. In a wandering incident, MedicAlert collaborates with emergency responders and provides the member's information to facilitate a safe return. MedicAlert communicates with the member's emergency contacts during and after a wandering incident.

Community help. If the person is reported found by law enforcement or another official agency, when provided with the member's ID number from an ID bracelet or ID accessory, MedicAlert will release the person's personal details, emergency contacts and medical information to first responders. If the person is reported found by a good Samaritan, MedicAlert will reach out directly to the member's emergency contacts to assist in a safe return to their family.

To learn more about and purchase a MedicAlert membership plan and ID products:  
Online: Go to [medicalert.org/alz](https://www.medicalert.org/alz) and use the promo code ALZ.

Phone: Call MedicAlert's Member Services line 800.ID.ALERT (800.432.5378) and use the promo code ALZ.

*Caregiving* often calls us  
to lean into **love**  
we didn't know *possible*.

—Tia Walker, author



**Macon County Health  
Department (Decatur, IL)**

**[www.maconcountyhealth.org](http://www.maconcountyhealth.org)**

***Macon County Health Department  
Starting Point  
Caregiver Advisory Services***

1221 E. Condit Street  
Decatur, IL 62521-1405  
(217) 423-6550

