

Charter

"How to safely take up the thread as an older person in our society"

a guide for the elderly and organizations that work with the elderly

The Framework

Corona makes no distinction. Whether you are young or slightly older, healthy or sick, male or female, corona can affect us all. This charter is aimed at the elderly and organizations that work with the elderly. In many protocols and sector guides, in order to resume social life in this era of corona, 65+ are identified as a vulnerable target group. This charter brings nuance. Age is not the determining factor, but frail health makes whether you belong to the risk group.

Who belongs to a risk group for the coronavirus?

People (i.e. not only the elderly) who belong to a risk group are people who have a higher risk of becoming seriously ill when infected with the coronavirus. These are:

- Adults with severe obesity.
- Adults with type 2 diabetes, combined with overweight and / or high blood pressure and / or cardiovascular disease and / or kidney disease.
- Adults with severely chronic cardiovascular, lung or kidney disorders.
- Adults with decreased immunity and / or cancer (under treatment).

The risk clearly increases with age. Especially in old age, the risk of serious complications when you fall ill increases significantly, especially if you belong to one or more of the risk groups.

If you belong to these risk groups, consult with your doctor or general practitioner before resuming your social activities and commitments.

The importance of this charter for the elderly

The elderly are not only a large group, they are also an active and indispensable link in our society. They participate in culture and sports, go out and taste many activities and events. But the voluntary commitment of the elderly is also invaluable. They take up very different roles in this: as a caregiver, as a volunteer, as a member of an association, as a grandmother or grandfather. They fulfil necessary tasks in very diverse areas such as sport, welfare, culture and care. Their commitments often also bring personal added value for the elderly themselves. Not only do older people derive great satisfaction from their voluntary work, they also get opportunities to learn and maintain social contacts.

During the corona crisis, these roles were forced to change or even temporarily stopped. Now that the measures are being scaled back, we would like to indicate how older people can take up the thread again and resume their activities in a conscious and safe manner. In consultation with the Flemish Council for the Elderly and the Flemish Family Care Platform, we made a charter to provide Flemish elderly people with the necessary tools to resume their social activities.

In the elaboration of this charter for the elderly, a conscious decision was made to move away from a general age limit for determining what is safe for whom. From now on, we look at your personal health and the risk level of the specific activity. We want every older person to make a personal risk assessment of both elements and to make informed choices based on this assessment.

In this charter you are central as an older person. You choose and act from your own personal situation, taking into account the characteristics of the activities you wish to include and of course always within the legally applicable measures determined by the National Security Council, the Flemish government or the local government.

The principles

In this charter we put forward 3 principles:

- 1. Always follow general guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19**
- 2. Estimate your personal health risk before starting an activity**
- 3. Take into account the risks associated with the activity**

Principle 1. Follow general guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19

The National Security Council decided on June 3 to approve the transition to phase 3 of the phase-out plan. Phase 3 means a radical change of approach. Freedom is the rule and what is not allowed the exception. Certain basic rules apply during this phase. There are 6 golden rules for individual behaviour that everyone must observe:

1. Always respect the hygiene measures below:
 - a. Stay at home, especially if you are ill.
 - b. Often wash your hands with soap and water.
 - c. Keep at least 1.5 meters away from people outside your personal bubble.
 - d. Limit your physical social contacts.
 - e. Wear a mask on public transport and in busy public places.
2. Prefer outdoor activities whenever possible. Provide adequate ventilation for indoor activities.
3. Be extra careful in contact with people who belong to a risk group.
4. It is possible to have closer contact with 10 people every week, on top of the family members (the extensive personal bubble). This is an individual right. These

ten people are allowed to change every week.

5. Always respect the safety distance of 1.5 m, except for people within the same family, for children under 12 years of age, and for people with whom there is closer contact, i.e. the extended bubble. Those who cannot respect the safe distance must wear a mask.
6. Private group meetings are limited to a maximum of 10 people, including children. This applies to all meetings, regardless of whether they take place at home or outside the home.

For organized activities there are a number of rules that deviate, for example in terms of the size of groups. You can find the last rules on www.infocoronavirus.be/nl.

Principle 2. Estimate your personal health risk before starting an activity

When resuming social activities, it is important to consider your own health beforehand. After all, the course of the epidemic has taught us that there are gradually higher risks as people age, mainly because of the connection with pre-existing health problems, such as chronic cardiovascular diseases. These people are more likely to become seriously ill if they are infected with the new coronavirus. This is because the natural defences of the body of older persons and in people who have a disease are often lower.

If you find it helpful as an older person, or if you suffer from a serious underlying condition, an individual assessment by the treating physician or general practitioner may help you make informed decisions about resuming your social activities as a volunteer or as a member of an association.

Elderly people who do not belong to the previously listed risk groups and who can properly assess the health risks themselves can resume their activities, provided that they take into account the precautions that are necessary when carrying out the various activities. If there is any uncertainty or ambiguity, we recommend discussing the resumption with the GP beforehand.

Are you unable to properly estimate the risk level of the social activity? No problem, under the following principle we explain what you should pay attention to.

Principle 3. Take into account the risks associated with the activity

3.1. Activities in an organized framework

Social activities in which the elderly can participate are very diverse and take place in very different contexts: they volunteer in a food bank or in a consultation centre for the young child, as a babysitting volunteer, as a volunteer in a socio-cultural organization or in a local service centre, as a guide in a museum, ... Each activity is different and has different characteristics in terms of what the activity entails, the context in which the activity takes place and the target group to whom it is addressed.

To make a good risk analysis of the activity, you need to consider the specific risk factors of each activity. In addition, the actions that the organization takes to control or minimize these risks are also extremely important.

The table below will help you assess the risk of the activity in concrete terms.

How do you use this table?

1. Check how the activity you want to take up scores on the different criteria. Always mark the correct risk category.
2. Add up the number of green, orange and red highlights.

		Risk		
		Low	Increased	High
Number of people	1 to 1	Green		
	Small group (to 10)	Green		
	Middle large group (to 100)		Orange	
	Large group (more than 100)			Red
Distance	Physical distance guaranteed	Green		
	Physical distance guaranteed most of the time		Orange	
	Physical distance not guaranteed (with protection)		Orange	
	Physical distance not guaranteed (without protection)			Red
Location	Outside	Green		
	Inside – enough room and ventilation	Green		
	Inside – not enough room or ventilation (with protection)		Orange	
	Inside – not enough room or ventilation (without protection)			Red
Duration contact	Short contact (< 15 min)	Green		
	Long contact (>15 min)		Orange	
Food and drink	No food and drink together	Green		
	Food and drink together		Orange	
Young and old	Only attendees from the same age group	Green		
	Attendees from different age groups		Orange	
Adherence to guidelines	Target group adheres to the guidelines	Green		
	Target group does not constantly adhere to the guidelines		Orange	
	Target group does not understand the guidelines (eg dementia)			Red
Caring tasks	No caring tasks	Green		
	Caring tasks without physical contact		Orange	
	Caring tasks with physical contact			Red

Note here your total number of green, orange and red highlights:

Low risk	Increased risk	High risk

What does the result say?

Green lights only: this activity seems safe. Comply with all guidelines.

One or more orange lights: the more orange lights, the riskier the activity. Use your common sense. If you have any doubts about your health, be sure to discuss this with your doctor. Also discuss your doubts with the organization. Comply with all guidelines.

1 or more red lights: Ask the organization what extra measures are being taken so that it can still go safely, and consult with your doctor whether this activity is appropriate for you in view of your health. Comply with all guidelines.

Based on the table above, we want to create a framework that allows you as an older person to start making an informed decision based on your own health characteristics, in combination with the risk factors of the activity.

3.2. Recommendations for organizations and associations

We would like to point out their responsibility to act as a "good family man" to organizations and associations that engage older volunteers. Make sure that voluntary work can run as safely as possible. Identify risk factors for each activity, and work out the necessary guidelines or a scenario based on the various types of activities to mitigate these risks. Provide guidelines and protection material for volunteers and participants, and respond to situations in which the guidelines are not respected. Above all, ensure good communication with and follow-up of your volunteers. Give them the opportunity to vent their hearts and express doubts.

As an organization, you can also refer to scenarios that are elaborated at sector level. The roadmap or guidelines should be made available to any volunteer and should preferably be discussed when the activity resumes.

3.3. Activities in an unorganized framework

Social activities are not only organized by associations and organizations. We take on the role of grandmother or grandfather, caregiver, or neighbour within our own (wider) family or neighbourhood. Here, too, older people ask themselves how they can safely take up these activities.

In these situations, there is no organization that guarantees that the activity and contact go safely. This makes it all the more important to stick to the 6 golden rules that you could read earlier in this charter. In addition, the table with an overview of the risk level also helps to make conscious choices. Be extra careful with situations where the light is on orange or red. Make wise choices, consult your doctor if in doubt, and take the necessary precautions yourself in situations associated with higher risks.

In the case of persons with a health risk or older persons who have difficulty assessing their health status, it is best to discuss this with the treating doctor or general practitioner in case of doubt or uncertainty.

3.4. Do you or the person you care for belong to a risk group?

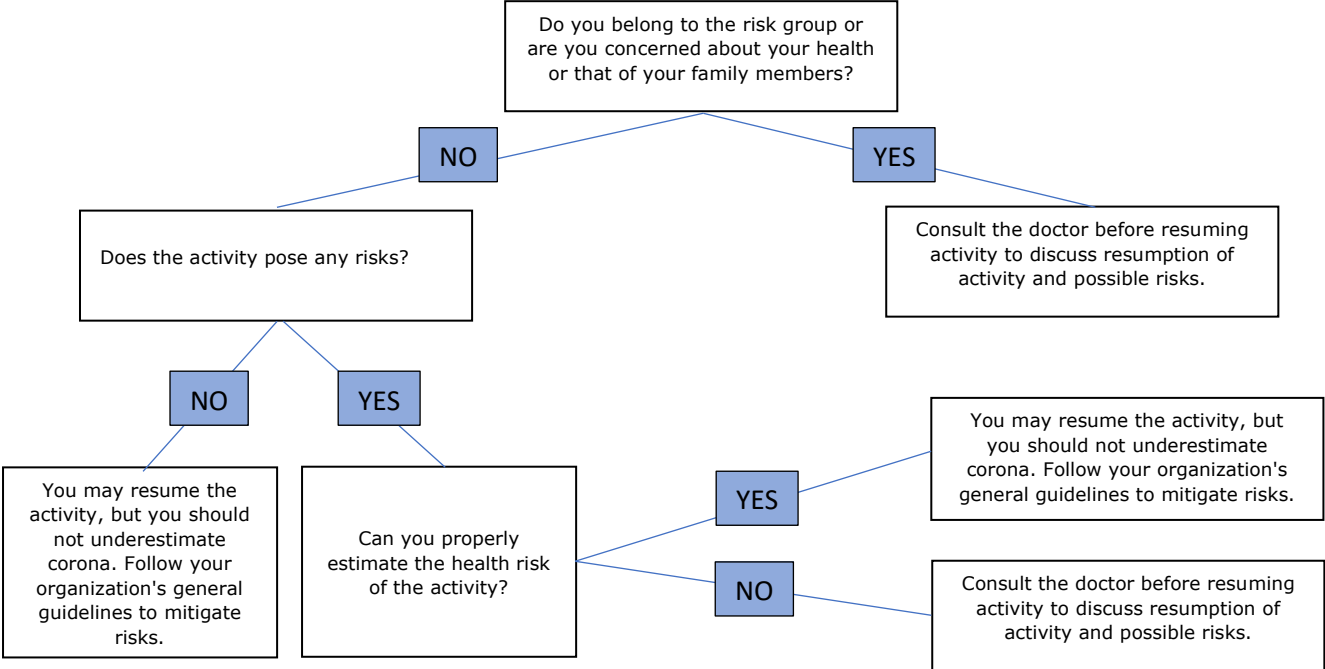
If you are an older person in one or more of the risk groups, you are at great risk if you become infected with Covid-19. The same applies if not you, but the person you care for as a caregiver belongs to a risk group.

Make sure you can respect the 6 golden rules, and preferably limit your social contacts to activities that mainly fall into the green category. So avoid activities in large groups, physical proximity without protective equipment (mouth mask, washing hands and disinfection), indoor social activities, ...

Extensively discuss how you can minimize risks to the absolute minimum and discuss this thoroughly with your doctor or general practitioner. Be aware of the risks you take for yourself and those around you.

Are you unsure whether to consult your doctor? This decision tree can help you make an estimate. In case of any uncertainty or ambiguity, we advise you to consult your doctor before actively participating in social activities again.

I am older and want to resume my social activities



Finally ⁱ

Fighting the virus is a responsibility of all of us, young and old. We count on your help at home, in your contacts with others and in your social commitments. Take into account the risks for yourself and the people around you. Get started with these guidelines within your own situation and organization. And thus help us to give everyone the opportunity to participate safely and fully again in society.

ⁱ This charter was drawn up in consultation with the Flemish Council of Elderly, OKRA vzw, the Flemish Support Point Volunteer work vzw, the Flemish Family Care Platform, the Flemish Patient Platform, Domus Medica, the Belgian Association for Gerontologie and Geriatrie, Prof. dr. Erika Vlieghe.