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## Senior Services Rush to Help Older New Yorkers

By Joseph De Avila

Nursing homes are restricting visits, senior centers are offering takeaway food, and nonprofit groups are ensuring older people can stay connected and informed about the coronavirus in New York City.

Across the five boroughs, the nonprofit sector is stepping up efforts to protect the city's most vulnerable population.

The coronavirus outbreak can be especially frightening for older people, say groups that work with seniors. Not only because they are more susceptible to the disease, but many are homebound.

Many groups that work with older residents are adjusting service based on discussions with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and city and state health officials.

The staff of the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, a nonprofit that serves about 44,000 people in the region, is screening for coronavirus symptoms during home visits and phone calls, said Andria Castellanos, chief of provider services for the organization.

The organization also is communicating with family members about how they can keep their loved ones safe, she said. "That's part of trying to reduce the anxiety level with what's going on with our patients," Ms. Castellanos said.

For the most part, patients are calm and interested in learning and following best practices to avoid contracting the virus, she said.

The Visiting Nurse Service is preparing in case staff members get sick, and is strategizing how it would continue to operate with a reduced



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HEBREW HOME AT RIVERDALE

workforce. "What is our usual business today may look very different four weeks from now," Ms. Castellanos said.

Other challenges are emerging for groups that serve seniors in the New York region. The nationwide shortage of personal-protective equipment and cleaning supplies is at the top of the list of concerns for nursing homes and medical professionals who care for seniors, according to nonprofit groups that work in this field.

And as for most New Yorkers, it is still unclear who can qualify for testing in the city, said Allison Nickerson, executive director of LiveOn NY, an advocacy group for older New Yorkers. Several senior organizations sent people displaying symptoms to the hospital recently but they were denied tests, she said.

Mayor Bill de Blasio on Sunday instructed Department for the Aging programs to close, and canceled all group meal, recreational, and educational services and activities. Senior

centers will now only offer take-home meals or deliver food to residences.

These services will be instrumental in the coming weeks, Ms. Nickerson said. "This is why this system is so important, so you can get meals to people who need it," she said. "For a lot of people the senior-service system is their only social network."

At the Hebrew Home at Riverdale in the Bronx, officials stopped visits for its 1,000 residents, said Daniel Reingold, chief executive of RiverSpring Health, a nonprofit that operates the facility. The only exception is for residents in hospice care or near the end of their lives, he said. "We cannot take any chances to allow any visitors to come in who are asymptomatic but are carrying the virus," he said.

Eileen Nagle, a 79-year-old Hebrew Home resident, said: "I think everyone is a little anxious because we can't do too much, and we are very accustomed to being busy."