

# When Family Members are hospitalized due to COVID-19

As the number of COVID-19 cases rises, hospitalizations will also increase. These hospitalizations can be extremely hard not only for patients, but also for family member. Loved ones may experience distress due to uncertainty about a loved one's recovery. They also may be concerned about their own risk of contracting the disease.

Additionally, family members may not be allowed to visit their loved ones in the hospital because of potential exposure. This creates difficult separations for everyone.

## How to manage uncertainty and elevated distress

- Engage in activities that support your health and help you relax. This may include exercise, meditation, prayer, or talking with friends and family.
- Maintain routines related to meals and bedtimes.
- Remember that your loved one is receiving the necessary care to support their recovery. Most individuals are successfully treated and are able to return home.
- Make sure you know where to access your loved one's important documents. This can include medical, legal, and financial documents.
- If your loved one is very sick, have conversations about their wishes for medical care.
- Stay in contact with the hospital staff who are able to give you updates.
- Know that you may not always hear back from hospital staff right away. Hospitals are very busy during this time.
- It is okay to advocate for yourself and your family to receive updates. Although providers want to keep you updated, they are very busy and may appreciate the reminder.

## How to stay connected when you are apart

- Evaluate each family member's current risk of exposure and determine if self-isolation is required.
- Remember that physical separation from loved ones is necessary to keep everyone safe and healthy.
- Keeping family members away from the hospital also allows healthcare teams to more effectively focus on caring for patients.
- Create opportunities to communicate safely via text, telephone, email, or video chat.
- Have your family members or children write letters or draw pictures.

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## How to communicate with children

- Consider each child's age and developmental level when deciding what information to share with them.
- Explain to children that most people get better. Provide children with updated information about your family member's health.
- It is appropriate to let children know that adults also have concerns (e.g., "I understand. I'm concerned about Grandpa too, but we'll get through this together."), but don't burden them with unnecessary worries.
- Encourage children to create projects that promote positive thoughts of the person that is ill. Find creative ways to share these with the person in the hospital.
- If your loved one is very sick, do not provide false assurance. If a death occurs, explain what happened using simple and clear language.
- Remember that children are likely to model the emotional reactions of adult caregivers.

### Reference:

Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress  
Department of Psychiatry  
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