Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for Caregivers

Plan

If you are caring for someone who is at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19, you should:

- Contact their healthcare provider to ask about getting extra necessary medications to have on hand in case you and your loved one need to stay home for a prolonged period of time.
- If you cannot get extra medications, consider using mail-order for medications.
- Be sure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms.
- Ensure you have enough medical supplies (oxygen, incontinence, dialysis, wound care) and create a back-up plan for getting more.
- Make sure your loved one has non-perishable food items on hand.
- Determine who can care for your loved one if you become sick. Stay in touch with others by phone or email. You may need to ask for help from friends, family, neighbors, community health workers, etc.
- Create an emergency contact list.
- Have disposable face masks and gloves to use if your loved one becomes sick. (See more information under “Monitor.”)

Take Precautions

- Keep your care environment clean. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces (for example tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks, and cell phones.) See EPA-registered disinfectants that kill COVID-19.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, or having been in a public place.
- If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your face, nose, and eyes.
- To the extent possible, avoid touching high-touch surfaces in public places – elevator buttons, door handles, handrails, handshaking with people, etc. Use a tissue or your sleeve to cover your hand or finger if you must touch something.
- If more food is needed, consider ways of getting food brought to the house through family, social, or commercial networks.
Monitor

- Pay attention for potential COVID-19 symptoms including, fever, cough, and shortness of breath. If you feel like you are developing symptoms, call your doctor.

- If your loved one develops emergency warning signs for COVID-19 get medical attention immediately. In adults, emergency warning signs:
  - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
  - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
  - New confusion or inability to arouse
  - Bluish lips or face

  (This list is not all inclusive. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.)

If your loved one has a respiratory infection

- If your loved one has symptoms, follow CDC’s recommended precautions for household members, intimate partners, and caregivers in a nonhealthcare setting of a patient with symptomatic laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 or a patient under investigation.

- You and your loved one should both wear masks. If only one mask is available, give it to your loved one to wear.

- Make sure the space where you are providing care has good air flow, such as an air conditioner or an open window, weather permitting.

- Keep as far away from your loved one as you can and still deliver care.
  - Minimize the transfer of objects between you and your loved one by offering a tray of food rather than handing off and collecting individual items.
  - Hand your loved one a thermometer rather than placing it in their mouth.
  - When talking to them, stand six feet away.

- During the period of illness, if feasible, keep your loved one in one bedroom and, if able, dedicate a bathroom for exclusive use by them.

- When cleaning their room, be sure to disinfect and scrub down all surfaces before allowing other household members to use the room again.

STRATEGIES TO REDUCE RISK WITHOUT PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

The first line of defense when caring for a loved one with a respiratory infection is the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), such as a mask, face shield, gloves, or gown. However, PPE may not be widely available. Note that the following strategies cannot protect you to the same degree as proper PPE and should not replace PPE and careful infection control behaviors.
• **If no masks are available**, help your loved one cover their cough when you are in the room. For instance, ask your loved one to cover their cough with a bandana, a sheet, or blanket. These will not stop the spread of viral particles but may limit the distance of spread.

• **If you do not have a protective gown, consider using trash bags, plastic bags, and saran wrap.** With trash bags, you can cut holes for your legs and cinch at the waist, then use another trash bag for the top of your body. Be careful to not touch furniture or other items in the house with your clothing or coverings after exposure to your sick loved one.

• **Bring an extra change of clothes and shoes and place them in a separate area.** When you leave or are done with your caretaking for the day, change into your clean clothes and shoes, placing soiled items into a trash bag for laundering. If possible, have one pair of shoes that you wear while giving care (that you do not wear elsewhere) until your loved one is better. Once they are better, leave shoes outdoors for 72 hours and then wipe with disinfectant, including sole of shoe, before using again.

• **When removing soiled clothing, gown, or other protective items (for example, trash bags), pull item away from neck and shoulders, touching inside only.** Dispose of all single-use items (for example, gloves and gown) in a sealed trash bag and launder all clothing after finishing your care shift.

• **In the absence of latex or nitrile gloves, you can use dishwashing gloves.** Dispose of them after use. As much as possible, carry dirty objects without touching them with your bare hands. For example, carry dirty sheets in a laundry basket. After use, disinfect it and scrub it with soap and water. (Note: Never place laundered items to a laundry basked used previously for soiled ones without cleaning and disinfecting the basket first).

• **If you cannot find disinfecting cleaner**, a paper towel dipped in 60% or greater isopropyl alcohol will kill the virus. Scrubbing with warm soap and water after disinfecting can be used as an additional precaution.

• **If you do not have a face shield or eye protection,** look for goggles that can be purchased at hardware stores, safety glasses used in a lab setting or for yard work, or even wear eyeglasses that do not impede your vision. The goal is to make sure you can see well while creating a barrier between you and the virus—this may also serve as a reminder to not touch your eyes. These items will not protect your eyes from exposure, but it may reduce the level of exposure.

### More information


If you have questions, please call 1-800-525-0127 and press # when you hear the message. Phone lines are open every day from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Telephonic interpretation services are available. For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.