

Caring for Someone With COVID-19

Care of individuals with COVID-19 is 2-fold: support the patient and prevent yourself and others from contracting SARS-CoV-2.

What Is Supportive Care?

At this time, there is no cure for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), although some treatments are being used in severe illness. For patients recovering at home, treatment is mainly supportive. For people with mild symptoms, this means staying well rested, drinking plenty of fluids, and monitoring symptoms. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever or chills, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, runny nose or congestion, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea. Some people have more severe symptoms that require hospitalization.

What Is Preventive Care?

You can be infected with severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) while taking care of someone with COVID-19. Although there is not yet a vaccine to prevent COVID-19, infection is preventable. The most important steps to prevent spread are wearing a mask, maintaining social distance whenever possible, washing hands often, and cleaning and sanitizing the home.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Caring for someone sick (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC])
www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/care-for-someone.html

Clinical care guidance (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-guidance-management-patients.html

Ride share guidance (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/rideshare-drivers-for-hire.html

Home care for patients (World Health Organization)
[www.who.int/publications/i/item/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts](http://www.who.int/publications/i/item/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts)

Caring for caregivers (American Medical Association)
www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/caring-our-caregivers-during-covid-19

JAMA COVID-19 information page
jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/pages/coronavirus-alert

Guidelines when caring for someone with COVID-19

COVID-19 is an illness caused by SARS-CoV-2. This highly contagious infection is spread by respiratory droplets. Caring for someone with COVID-19 at home involves taking care of the patient and preventing the spread of infection to others in the household.

If you are caring for someone who has COVID-19, follow these general recommendations for the patient:

- Help the patient follow their doctor's advice, which includes isolating at home.
- Encourage rest and drinking plenty of fluids.
- Some patients lose their appetite. Try soft, high-calorie foods such as protein shakes and smoothies.
- Use over-the-counter medications like acetaminophen for fever and body aches.
- Help the patient with daily activities like food preparation and pet care. Use delivery services for grocery and pharmacy needs to limit trips outdoors.
- Monitor for worsening symptoms such as continued fever and more severe shortness of breath.
- Recovery can be stressful and lonely. Support emotional well-being.

To protect yourself and others, take these precautions:

- Wear a mask or face covering—this applies to both the caregiver and the patient.
- Maintain a distance of at least 6 ft whenever possible. Try to have a dedicated space for the patient and do not share bedrooms or bathrooms.
- If only 1 bathroom is available, it should be sanitized with a household disinfectant between uses.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Clean and sanitize the living space, especially high-touch surfaces (doorknobs, light switches, bathroom fixtures, remote controls, etc).
- Minimize physical contact with others. Do not share common household items such as cups and utensils. Use gloves if handling laundry or shared dishes.
- Do not have visitors in the home.
- Limit ride sharing. If sharing a vehicle is unavoidable, passengers should wear a mask and sit as far apart as possible. Avoid recirculated air; open windows if possible. Clean and disinfect the vehicle afterward.
- Quarantine—if you have close prolonged contact with someone who has COVID-19, you should quarantine for 14 days from your last date of contact. Household members who have been instructed to quarantine should not leave home except for medical care.
- Monitor your health. Know the symptoms of COVID-19 and your health history. Some people are at higher risk of complications from COVID-19.



When to seek help from a health care professional

Call 911 for any sudden trouble breathing, chest pressure, a blue tinge to lips or face, confusion, or difficulty staying awake. Contact the patient's doctor with other general questions.

Caregivers should be aware of their close exposure to COVID-19 and contact their doctor regarding concerns like testing or quarantine.

Authors: Lindsey Y. Mortenson, MD; Preeti N. Malani, MD, MSJ; Robert D. Ernst, MD

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Wolff JL, Freedman VA, Mulcahy JF. Family caregivers' experiences with health care workers in the care of older adults with activity limitations. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2020;3(1):e1919866. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.19866

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