Managing COVID-19 at Home: Information for Caregivers

This information explains what to do if you’re taking care of someone who has or might have COVID-19 at home. In this resource, the phrase “the patient” means the person you’re taking care of.

Avoid caring for someone who has COVID-19 if you have any chronic medical conditions or a weak immune system. If you have any questions about whether you should be taking care of someone who has or might have COVID-19, talk with your healthcare provider.

Help the Patient Manage Their Symptoms

You can help the patient manage their symptoms by bringing them over-the-counter cold medications, light meals, and lots of liquids. You should also make sure their temperature is measured 2 times a day. For more information about managing COVID-19 symptoms, read the resource Managing COVID-19 at Home (www.mskcc.org/pe/covid_home).

Make sure you know how to contact the patient’s healthcare provider. Call their healthcare provider right away if:

- They have trouble breathing when they’re resting.
- They have trouble breathing when they walk short distances. An example of a short distance is walking from one room to another, about 25 feet (7.6 meters).
- They’re getting chemotherapy and have a new fever of 100.4 °F (38 °C) or higher.
- They have a fever of 102 °F (38.9 °C) or higher that lasts for 24 hours and
doesn’t get better after they take acetaminophen (Tylenol®).

- They have blood in their sputum (mucus they cough up).
- They have chest pain.
- They have a very bad headache.
- You or they have questions or concerns.

Keep COVID-19 From Spreading

COVID-19 can easily be passed from one to person to another. It may spread in droplets in the air or left on surfaces after a sick person coughs or sneezes. It can also be spread by touching a sick person and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Follow the instructions in this section to help keep COVID-19 from spreading to other people in your home and community. If the patient hasn’t had a positive COVID-19 test and is waiting for their COVID-19 test results, you can stop following these instructions if their test is negative. A positive COVID-19 test means the test showed they have COVID-19. A negative COVID-19 test means the test didn’t show they have COVID-19.

- If the patient has COVID-19 and has symptoms, keep following these instructions until:
  - They haven’t had a fever above 100.4 °F (38 °C) for at least 3 days without using medication to lower fevers. Examples of these medications include acetaminophen (Tylenol®), ibuprofen (Advil®), naproxen (Aleve®), full dose aspirin (more than 81 mg daily), and indomethacin (Tivorbex®).
  - Their breathing problems have gotten better or their breathing is back to usual.
  - They have a negative COVID-19 test at least 10 days after their first positive test or it has been at least 4 weeks since their first positive COVID-19 test.
If the patient has COVID-19 but doesn’t have any symptoms, keep following these instructions until:

- They have a negative COVID-19 test at least 10 days after their first positive test or it has been at least 4 weeks since their first positive COVID-19 test (and they haven’t developed symptoms).

If any of the symptoms the patient had when they first got sick come back, start following these instructions again right away and call their healthcare provider.

It’s okay if the patient takes baby aspirin (81 mg per day) if their healthcare provider told them to in the past. If they feel they need to take a higher dose, talk with their healthcare provider first.

Avoid contact with the patient as much as you can

- Have the patient stay in one room away from other people and pets as much as they can.
- Have the patient use a separate bathroom, if they can.
- Don’t share towels, bedding, dishes, drinking glasses, cups, or eating utensils with the patient.
  - Wash used dishes, drinking glasses, cups, and eating utensils well with soap and water or a dishwasher.
  - Keep the patient’s dirty laundry (such as clothes, bedding, bath, and hand towels) in a laundry bag. Don’t shake the dirty laundry. Wash it using regular laundry soap on the hottest setting available. Dry it well.

Clean your hands often

- Clean your hands before and after you touch the the patient, touch anything that’s directly around the patient, or go into the room the patient is staying in.
  - If you’re washing your hands with soap and water, wet your hands and apply soap. Rub your hands together well for at least 20 seconds, then rinse. Dry your hands with a disposable towel and use that same towel to turn off the faucet. If you don’t have disposable towels, it’s OK to use clean cloth towels.
Replace them when they're wet.

- If you’re using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, be sure to cover all of your hands with it, rubbing them together until they’re dry.

**Wear a face covering, gloves, or both**

- Wear a cloth face covering (such as a bandana, scarf, or handkerchief) over your nose and mouth while taking care of the patient. To make your own cloth facemask, follow the CDC’s instructions at [https://bit.ly/3cKkV4a](https://bit.ly/3cKkV4a). To take off the face covering or facemask:
  1. Untie it without touching the front.
  2. Put it with your dirty laundry. If you’re using a disposable face covering (face covering you only use once), throw it away in a waste bin with a lid.
  3. Clean your hands right away.

- Use disposable gloves and a face covering when handling the patient’s body fluids, such as mucus, saliva (spit), and stool (poop). To take off the gloves and face covering:
  1. Take off the gloves. Throw them away in a waste bin with a lid.
  2. Clean your hands.
  3. Take off the face covering. Untie it without touching the front, then put it with your dirty laundry. If you’re using a disposable face covering, throw it away in a waste bin with a lid.
  4. Clean your hands again.

- Use gloves and protective clothing (such as an apron) when cleaning and disinfecting surfaces or handling dirty laundry.
  - Clean your hands after you take off the gloves.
  - Wash your protective clothing before wearing it again.

Don’t reuse masks or gloves. Put used masks, gloves, and other waste into a waste bin with a lid.
Clean and disinfect surfaces

- Clean and disinfect surfaces you touch often (such as phones, remote controls, counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables) every day. Use soap and water or a household cleaning spray or wipe. Follow the instructions on the label.

- Clean and disinfect bathroom and toilet surfaces at least once every day. Use soap and water or a household cleaning spray or wipe.

- Only clean and disinfect surfaces the patient touches (such as in their bedroom or bathroom) when you need to. Wear a face covering and wait as long as you can after the patient has touched the surface.

Tips for Managing Stress

It’s normal to feel worried about COVID-19, especially if you or your loved one is sick. You can take care of yourself by doings things such as:

- Calling or video chatting with a friend or loved one.
- Starting a new hobby or doing an activity you usually don’t have time for.
- Taking a break from the news.

MSK has many professionals, volunteers, and support programs that can help you cope during this time. For more information, call the Counseling Center at 646-888-0200, the Social Work Department at 212-639-7020, or visit www.mskcc.org/experience/patient-support/counseling. We also offer free online support groups through our Virtual Programs. Visit www.mskcc.org/vp for more information.

Additional Resources

For more tips for managing stress, read the resource Managing Stress and Anxiety Caused by COVID-19 (www.mskcc.org/pe/stress_anxiety_covid).

For more information about what to do if you or a person in your home has COVID-19, visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick.
For the latest information about how MSK is prepared for COVID-19, visit www.mskcc.org/coronavirus.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.