

# Home Care Instructions for Patients and Their Caregivers when COVID-19 is Suspected or Confirmed

These home care instructions are for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and those helping to care for them. It is for patients going home after being in the hospital, or for patients who do not need hospital care.

## Instructions for the patient

*You should isolate yourself at home. This means not going out and staying away from others, even members of your own household, as much as possible.*

**Stay home unless your symptoms are getting worse and you need medical care.**

- Do not go to work, school, stores, or other public areas.
- Use food delivery or ask friends and family to get food and other needed items for you.
- Do not leave your home except to get essential medical care.
  - If you have an important in-person medical appointment, call the office ahead of time and tell them you have or may have COVID-19.
  - Put on a facemask or cloth face cover before you enter any healthcare facility (including doctor's office, x-ray facility, blood draw location, etc.).
- If you must leave your home for an essential appointment or for any other reason, do not use public transportation, ride-sharing (Uber, Lyft), or taxis.
- If you are having trouble getting the things you need or getting to an essential appointment, please call our Social Work department at 617-667-3421 to talk about ideas that might help.

**Get help right away if your symptoms get worse**

- Call 911 for emergencies. You and your caregiver should watch for the following symptoms. If any of them occur, call 911 and tell the operator that you have or may have COVID-19. **Call 911 if you have:**
  - Trouble breathing
  - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
  - New confusion or trouble waking up
  - Bluish lips or face
- **Call your primary care doctor or nurse practitioner right away if you have any other symptoms that concern you, but especially for the symptoms below. Remember, your primary care provider, or someone covering for them, is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call for:**
  - Worsening cough or respiratory symptoms
  - A new fever (100.4F/38C or above) after your fevers were gone for several days

## Tips to help your recovery

Recovery and home isolation can be difficult, physically and emotionally. Here are some tips that may help.

- Be sure to rest and drink plenty of fluid.
- Stick to a routine; get dressed every day.
- If you feel up for it, try to stay active. It is not necessary or helpful to stay in bed. Walk laps in your room, or try some online yoga or exercise videos. Take care not to overexert.
- Make a point to connect with those close to you by phone, email, video-call, or texting.
- Develop a "self-care toolkit." What helps you relax? It may be journaling, reading, yoga, music. Use your toolkit frequently.
- Remind yourself that this is temporary.

## Separate yourself from others in your home

- If you can, stay in a separate room away from others. If possible, this room should be well-ventilated, with an open window, weather permitting.
- Use a separate bathroom and bedroom if possible.
- Eat meals in a separate room.
- Do not have any visitors.
- If you need to be in the same room as another person, stay at least 6 feet apart and wear a mask or face cover as instructed below. No touching, hugging, or kissing others.
- If possible, avoid people with chronic illnesses (such as heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease), people over 60 years old, pregnant women, or people with illnesses or treatments that suppress the immune system.
- Because it is unknown if pets can spread the virus, avoid contact with pets and other animals. If you need to have contact with pets, wash your hands before and after and wear a facemask.

## Wear a face covering if you (the sick person) need to be close to others

- Wear a fitted surgical mask that covers your mouth and nose if you need to be in a room with others. If you do not have a mask, use a cloth face cover (such as a scarf or bandanna, or a home-made mask). This short video explains how you can quickly make mask at home: [www.bit.ly/3eiyx8g](http://www.bit.ly/3eiyx8g)
- If the sick person is having trouble wearing the mask or face cover, the other people in the room should wear one instead.
- If the mask or face cover gets wet or dirty, replace it with a clean, dry one. When removing it from your face, don't touch the front part that was over your nose and mouth. Don't touch your nose, mouth, or eyes.

## Clean your hands often

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Be especially sure to wash with soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty.
- Use disposable paper towels to dry your hands. If these are not available, use clean dry cloth towels to dry your hands and replace them when they become damp from repeated use.
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (ideally with at least 60 percent alcohol), covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they are dry.

## Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze

- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or into the inside of your elbow.
- Throw used tissues in a lined trash can and wash your hands.

## Avoid sharing personal household items

- Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people or pets in your home. After using these items, wash them thoroughly with soap and water or in the dishwasher.

## Cleaning and disinfecting

- You should clean any areas in your personal bathroom or bedroom if they become soiled.
- If a separate bathroom is not available, you should clean and disinfect the shared bathroom after each use. If you are not able to do this yourself, your caregiver should clean and disinfect the things you touched. They should wait as long as possible after you've used the bathroom before cleaning it. But it must be cleaned before someone else uses it.

- Your caregiver should clean and disinfect all shared, frequently-touched surfaces in common areas every day. This includes counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, laundry hampers, light switches, and bedside tables.
- For cleaning, first use a regular household cleaning soap or detergent on the surface if it is dirty. Then, use a household disinfectant. Most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. (A link to EPA-registered agents is included at the end of this handout.) Or a diluted household bleach solution may be used if it is appropriate for the surface being cleaned. A dilute bleach solution can be made using 5 tablespoons of concentrated bleach per gallon of water. Refer to product instructions, use gloves, and ensure adequate ventilation when cleaning and disinfecting. Never mix bleach with ammonia or other household cleaners.

## Instructions for washing clothes

- Use regular detergent for washing.
- Dirty laundry from an ill person can be washed with other people's items.
- Clean and disinfect clothes hampers according to guidance above. If possible, consider placing a bag liner into the hamper that can be thrown away or washed.
- If someone is helping you with laundry, they should wear gloves when handling your dirty laundry. They should wash their hands after removing gloves.

## Disposing of gloves, masks, and other contaminated items

- Gloves used for cleaning should be disposable if possible and should be thrown away after each use. If reusable gloves are used, they should be used only for cleaning and disinfecting for COVID-19 and should not be used for other reasons.
- Clean your hands after removing your gloves.

- Place all used disposable gloves, disposable masks, and other contaminated items in a trash bag before disposing of them with other household waste.
- Clean your hands after handling these items.

## When to stop home isolation

Because COVID-19 is a new disease, guidelines on isolation and treatments are changing as doctors around the world learn more about it. Isolation can be discontinued using one of two strategies. Your doctor or nurse practitioner will tell you which strategy you will be following. Please follow the specific advice you are given.

**1. Time-based strategy:** This is used for most patients. Isolation stops when **all** of the following have happened:

- It has been at least 14 days from when you left the hospital OR, if you were not in the hospital, at least 14 days since your symptoms started  
**AND**
- Your fever has been gone for at least 3 days without the use of fever-reducing medications  
**AND**
- Your symptoms have gotten better (but may not be completely gone)

**2. Test-based strategy:** In some cases your doctor or nurse practitioner may order additional COVID-19 tests to see if you still have the virus. If your provider chooses this strategy, he or she will tell you when to stop your isolation. This will be when all of the following have happened:

- Your fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medications  
**AND**
- Your respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath) have improved  
**AND**
- After the above have occurred, you have had two negative COVID-19 tests, obtained at least 24 hours apart

## Additional instructions for caregivers and household contacts

- Ideally, assign one person who is in good health to be the primary caregiver.
- Read the above information thoroughly.
- If the sick person can't wear a mask or face cover, you should wear one while in the same room with them.
- Wash your hands frequently as directed above.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- You (caregiver) should clean frequently touched surfaces, as described above. If needed, you may help wash/clean the sick person's clothes, dishes, and personal space/bathroom if they cannot. Do so only as needed to avoid unnecessary contact with the sick person or with things they have touched. Wear gloves. Use disposable gloves if they are available. If reusable gloves are used, those gloves should be dedicated for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and items for COVID-19 and should not be used for other purposes. Always wash your hands after removing gloves.
- Monitor the ill person for worsening symptoms as directed above.
- Monitor yourself for symptoms for at least 14 days after the sick person is off isolation. Monitor for:
  - fever (temperature of 100.4F/38C or more)
  - cough
  - shortness of breath
  - nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Call your healthcare provider if you develop these symptoms and inform them you are a close contact of someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19.

*This material was developed by BIDMC clinicians and is adapted from information provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). For more information from the CDC, please visit:*

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>



## Stay at home and separate yourself from others

- Stay at home until your isolation period is over.
- Stay in a room away from other household members if possible. Use a separate bathroom if you have one.
- Do not share dishes/utensils, towels, or bed sheets with others in your home.



## When to call 911

Call 911 if you have:

- Trouble breathing
- Pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or trouble waking up
- Blue lips or face



## Wear a mask or face cover if you must be with others

- If you must be in a room with others, or if you go out to an essential appointment, cover your nose and mouth with a mask or cloth face cover.



## Wash your hands

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Wash your hands right after you have sneezed, coughed, or blown your nose, before eating, and when your hands look dirty.



## Cover coughs & sneezes

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough.
- Put used tissues in the trash. Then wash your hands.



## Clean & disinfect

- You (the patient) should clean your personal space and your bathroom if you can. Someone else in the home should clean areas that are touched by everyone.
- Clean with soap and water or a household cleaner, then disinfect.
- To disinfect, use a household disinfectant or a mix of 5 tablespoons of bleach with one gallon of water. Use gloves. Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaners.

Please call your doctor if you have any other symptoms that worry you or if you have any questions about your care.

# Use a Face Cover to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19

## Who should wear a face cover?

All people should wear a face cover when going out in public. People who are sick should wear a face cover when at home too, if they are in the same room with others.

## What is a face cover?

A face cover is any well fitted cloth (such as a bandana or scarf) that covers the mouth and nose and stays attached to your face while you are wearing it.

## How to clean a cloth face cover

Wash the face cover with soap and water or use a washing machine every day.

## How to make a face cover

You can make a face cover by using a scarf, small towel, bandana, or an old T-shirt. It should fit snugly to your mouth and over your nose. A thicker fabric is better to keep germs out. Once you are sure it covers your mouth and nose, it can be secured behind your ears with rubber bands or tied behind your head.

View this short video to see how to make one at home: [www.bit.ly/3eiyx8g](http://www.bit.ly/3eiyx8g)



## Dos and Don'ts for face covers

### Do:

- ✓ Make sure you can breathe through it
- ✓ Wear if you must be out in public and any time you are close to others
- ✓ Make sure it covers your nose and mouth
- ✓ Wash each day and any time it is wet or dirty
- ✓ Dry the face cover before you put it on

### Do NOT:

- ✗ Touch your eyes, nose, or mouth when you take off the cover
- ✗ Touch the front part of the face cover when taking it off
- ✗ Use for kids less than two years old
- ✗ Use if you have trouble breathing