

## Caring for a COVID-19 patient at home

Think like a combination of nurse and hotel room service.

For more than 100 years, nurses and other health care workers have followed basic steps to take care of people with contagious diseases, while protecting themselves from infections.

If someone you live with has COVID-19 symptoms but isn't sick enough to need a hospital, now it's your turn to provide "supportive care" while protecting your health.

Here are 14 ways how:

**1. Pick a 'sick room':** The sick person should stay in a bedroom with a door if at all possible, and not come out except to go to the bathroom. No one else should spend time in that room more than absolutely necessary. Children and pets should stay out. Keep a window open in the sick room if possible, to keep air circulating. Provide tissues.

If you don't have more than one bedroom, give them the bedroom, and you can sleep on the couch or other temporary spot like an inflatable mattress, so you can still use the living room, kitchen and other spaces while they stay in their room.

**2. Pick a 'sick bathroom':** If you have two bathrooms, make one of them the sick person's bathroom, and don't let anyone else use it. If you don't have two, you're going to have to clean every surface they touch after they go to the bathroom, so it's clean when you or other people you live with need to use it. (see cleaning tips below.) And don't share water cups.

**3. Help them track their symptoms:** Have them take their temperature several times a day, without getting close to them. Write down the readings, and note when new symptoms occur.

**4. Help them hydrate:** Make sure they're drinking a lot of water and other non-alcoholic clear liquids.

**5. Ease their symptoms:** Help them understand how often they can take medicine to reduce their fever, like acetaminophen and ibuprofen. (Michigan Medicine physicians have reviewed the evidence about these medications and others that have been in the news for COVID-19; [see more information here.](#)) Make sure the sick person understands how much to take – read the label on the bottle and follow it. If they have a bad cough, help them understand how much cough medicine to take and when.

Don't let them take more than the recommended dose of any medicine, or use alcohol when taking a medicine that advises against it. Keep track of what the sick person has taken and when.

Make sure they keep taking any other medicines they would usually take, unless their doctor has told them to stop.

**6. Keep them comfortable and entertained, while keeping your distance:** Make sure they have blankets and pillows, books, magazines, and a computer or TV to pass the time, and a charger for their phone near their bed, so you don't have to go in and out of the room. Keep the house or apartment quiet so they can sleep.

**7. Help them with food, but keep your distance:** Find a tray or cookie sheet that you can use to bring them food or drinks when they need it.

If they can get out of bed: Put the food and drinks on the tray, and place it outside their closed door. Walk away. They can open the door, get the tray, eat in their room, and then put the tray back on the floor outside the door and close it.

If they can't get out of bed: Wear a mask or cloth over your mouth and nose when you go in their room, and have them cover theirs too. Bring their food and drink to their bedside table, and go back after a while to pick it up again, wearing a mask or cloth again. Wash their dishes thoroughly with hot water and soap. Don't touch your face after handling their dishes, and wash your hands thoroughly after you touch anything they ate or drank from.

**8. Keep their laundry separate:** Bring changes of clothes and pajamas to them if they're not already in the sick room. Get your clothes out of the sick room if they're usually stored there.

Make sure they have a basket, hamper or bag in the sick room to put clothes, towels, washcloths and bedding in. Have them put it outside their door when it's full, or wear a mask or cloth over your mouth and nose when you go in to get it. Wash their clothes, towels and bedding separately from anyone else's.

**9. Clean, clean, clean:** Go through your entire home and use disinfectant spray or wipes to clean everything the sick person might have touched when they were in the early stages of getting sick, or when they were contagious before developing symptoms.

This includes tables, hard-backed chairs, doorknobs, light switches, remote controls, handles on cabinets and refrigerators, desks, toilets, sinks, computer keyboards and mice, tablets, and more. Wash things they wore or used in the days before you isolated them in the 'sick room.'

**10. Say no to visitors:** You shouldn't be having guests over anyway, or people working inside your home. If you have to see someone in person, do it outside your home, preferably outdoors, and stay at least six feet away from them. If they're bringing you something, ask them to put it down and step away so you can pick it up.

**11. Use technology to connect:** It may seem silly to do a video chat or voice call with someone in the next room, but it can give the sick person human contact with you, your children or pets, and others in the home, without spreading the virus. Make sure they can connect virtually with others, too – including relatives, friends, coworkers and faith organizations. This can ease the awfulness of being sick and stuck in one room.

**12. Stay home yourself:** Now that you and others in your home have had contact with someone who has or might have COVID-19, you could carry the virus with you to work or the store, even if you don't have symptoms.

Tell your boss you have someone in your home with symptoms, and ask if this means you should stay home or wear a mask at work. Plan to order delivery from restaurants and grocery stores, or ask friends or family if they are able to shop for you, and leave the items outside your front door. If those options aren't available, wear a mask over your mouth and nose and make as few trips as possible.

If you have a yard, garden, patio, balcony or porch, spend time there to get outdoors, but stay six feet away from anyone who doesn't live with you.

**13. Don't be afraid to ask for help or moral support:** It's OK to let friends, neighbors and family know that someone you live with is sick, and to seek and accept their help while not letting them near the sick person. You don't have to tell your whole social media network, but at least tell a few people you can rely on. They can bring you supplies from the 'outside world' and leave them on your doorstep, or ship them to you. They can walk your dog, though you should wipe down the leash first.

Don't forget that you need emotional support and connection to help you get through your time as a COVID-19 caregiver. As the nation works to fight the spread of the virus, and care for the sick, we're all affected in some way. But connecting with one another in safe ways can help us cope.

**14. After they're better:** Someone who has had COVID-19, whether they got tested or not, should stay home and away from others until they meet the following criteria: As of July 2, 2020, CDC guidelines state that if you think or know someone has had COVID-19, they can be with others only after they've been fever-free, without medication, for three days AND their respiratory symptoms have improved (this includes coughing or shortness of breath) AND it has been 10 days since their symptoms first appeared. The CDC also states that people who have been around someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 should stay home for 14 days after that exposure.

Afterward, you, and they, should do a thorough cleaning of the 'sick room', including wiping down all hard surfaces, washing bedding including blankets, and vacuuming.

[For more about caring for someone with known or suspected COVID-19, and for CDC guidelines for asymptomatic carriers, those who are immunocompromised \(have weakened immune systems\) and those who think they have been exposed to the coronavirus, visit the CDC's website.](#)