Caring for COVID-19 at home

Most people who become ill with COVID-19 are able to recover at home. But it’s essential to observe strict hygiene and physical distancing measures to protect others at home from the highly contagious novel coronavirus, UCI Health infectious disease experts say.

Because the incubation period for COVID-19 can range from two to 14 days, it is possible that your family already has been exposed to the virus by the time you were diagnosed. In case they haven’t, it is still important to take precautions.

To care for yourself while protecting other members of your household, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends several measures.

Physical separation
If you are ill with COVID-19, you must isolate yourself as much as possible from the rest of the household. This means:

- Limit yourself to one room, away from others in your home.
- Keep a 6-foot distance from others in the home as much as possible.
- Avoid hugging, kissing or touching others while you are sick.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue that you immediately discard.
- Use a separate bathroom, if at all possible, and clean surfaces you touch after use.
- Avoid the kitchen and other common areas, especially when others are in the room.
- Stay at home except for serious medical care that might require hospitalization.
- Avoid public places or shopping.
- Avoid public transportation, taxis or ridesharing services.

Ask family members, friends or neighbors to deliver needed groceries and supplies to your doorstep.

Observe strict hygiene
The novel coronavirus is transmitted primarily in two ways:

- Direct droplet spray from a sick person into the eyes, nose, or mouth of another person
- Touching something contaminated with the virus and then eating or touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands

Remember, the COVID-19 virus can live on surfaces for several hours and sometimes one or two days. So it’s a good idea to equip your personal living area with disinfecting supplies along with other essentials, such as a thermometer, drinking cups and medications your doctor may recommend.
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These steps are critical to avoid transmission of the virus:

- Everyone in the household should wash hands frequently with soap and water or a hand sanitizer (with 60% to 90% alcohol content), especially after touching door handles, refrigerators and other commonly used objects.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces in your area, such as your bathroom sink, phone, keyboard and night table. Avoid having others touch those. Caregivers should clean areas in the rest of the house.
- Avoid doing your dishes if you are coughing or sneezing. If a family member is doing your dishwashing for you, ensure they clean items with soap immediately to prevent others from accidentally touching contaminated dishes. Another option is to use disposable utensils and dishes.
- Don’t share any items, including food, dishes (plates, cups and utensils), towels or bedding with others.
- Only caregivers should enter your room and they should be wearing a face mask. You should wear a mask, too.
- Caregivers should use gloves whenever handling or cleaning soiled items that may contain your secretions or body fluids. If gloves are not available, clean hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling any contaminated items.
- Immediately clean any surfaces that may have oral/nasal secretions, blood, stool, or body fluids on them.
- Wash clothes/linens thoroughly – over-the-counter laundry detergent will easily kill the virus, using the warmest possible temperature. Dry thoroughly using the temperatures recommended on the linen/clothing label.

When can you rejoin the family?

It’s also important to know when you’re able to rejoin the rest of the household and go outside. If you have not been tested for COVID-19, you may consider ending your quarantine:

- After three full days without a fever (and no fever-reducing medication)
- Your symptoms have improved
- After at least seven days have passed since your symptoms appeared

If all three conditions are met, you may rejoin the family, but you should continue to wear a mask for seven more days. Most important, stay in touch with your doctor’s office throughout your illness. This will ensure you have the best, most up-to-date information about your progress, how to treat your specific symptoms and when you can end self-isolation.

For more information, visit ucihealth.org/covid-19