Coronavirus (COVID-19): Care Instructions

Overview

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is caused by a virus. It was first found in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. It has since spread worldwide.

This virus spreads person-to-person through droplets from coughing and sneezing. It can also spread when you are close to someone who is infected. And it can spread when you touch something that has the virus on it, such as a doorknob or a tabletop.

The best way to protect yourself from getting sick is to avoid areas where there is an outbreak. Avoid people who may be infected. Stay away from crowds and try to stay at least 6 feet away from other people. Wash your hands often, especially after you cough or sneeze. Use soap and water, and scrub for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your mouth, nose, and eyes.

Symptoms include a cough, a fever, and shortness of breath. Most people only have mild symptoms or even none at all. People who are very sick are treated in a hospital. In severe cases, it can cause pneumonia and make it hard to breathe without help. It can cause death.

The virus is diagnosed with a test that uses a swab of fluid from the nose or throat or sometimes uses sputum from the lungs. Other tests may be done, such as blood tests and CT scans of the lungs. But even if you don't have a test, a doctor may ask you questions and determine that you may have the virus.

There is no medicine to fight the virus. If you have mild symptoms, you can care for yourself at home. Your doctor may have you take acetaminophen (Tylenol) for a fever. Treatment in the hospital for more serious cases includes support, such as help with breathing.

If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or are at high risk of having been exposed to the virus, you must take steps to keep from spreading it to others. Cover your mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands right away. Wear a face mask if you are sick and are around other people. It can help stop the spread of the virus when you cough or sneeze.

Wash your hands often, especially after you cough or sneeze. Use soap and water, and scrub for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

You will be told to isolate yourself for about 14 days, probably at home. Your doctor or another health professional will tell you when it's okay to come out of isolation. Leave your home only if you need to get medical care. But call the doctor's office first so they know you're coming, and wear a face mask when you go.

Limit contact with pets and people in your home. If possible, stay in a separate bedroom and use a separate bathroom.

Clean and disinfect your home every day. Use household cleaners and disinfectant wipes or sprays. Take special care to clean things that you grab with your hands. These include doorknobs, remote controls, phones, and handles on your refrigerator and microwave. And don't forget countertops, tabletops, bathrooms, and computer keyboards.

You can find the latest information from these sources:

- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Go to the CDC website at www.cdc.gov for updates about the disease and travel advice. The website also tells you ways to prevent the spread of infection.
- World Health Organization (WHO). Go to the WHO website at www.who.int for information about the virus, including updates on the outbreak and for travel advice.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Stay home. Don't go to school, work, or public areas. And don't use public transportation.
- Leave your home only if you need to get medical care. But call the doctor's office first so they know you're coming, and wear a face mask when you go.
- Wear a face mask if you are sick and are around other people. It can help stop the spread of the virus when you cough or sneeze.
- Limit contact with people in your home. If possible, stay in a separate bedroom and use a separate bathroom.
- Avoid contact with pets and other animals.
• Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then throw it in the trash right away.
• Wash your hands often, especially after you cough or sneeze. Use soap and water, and scrub for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren’t available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
• Don’t share personal household items. These include bedding, towels, cups and glasses, and eating utensils.
• Clean and disinfect your home every day. Use household cleaners and disinfectant wipes or sprays. Take special care to clean things that you grab with your hands. These include doorknobs, remote controls, phones, and handles on your refrigerator and microwave. And don’t forget countertops, tabletops, bathrooms, and computer keyboards.
• Be safe with medicines. Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
• Wait for your doctor or other health professional to tell you it’s okay to leave isolation. Call them when the time is up and let them know how you’re feeling.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:
• You have severe trouble breathing.
• You have severe dehydration. Symptoms of dehydration include:
  ○ Dry eyes and a dry mouth.
  ○ Passing only a little urine.
  ○ Feeling thirstier than usual.
• You are extremely confused or not thinking clearly.
• You pass out (lose consciousness).

If you have a high risk of having been exposed to this virus, or you have tested positive but don’t have symptoms, call your doctor now if you develop symptoms such as:
• Shortness of breath.
• Fever.
• Cough.

If you have been diagnosed with coronavirus disease and already have a cough, fever, or shortness of breath, call your doctor now if your symptoms get worse or you don’t get better as expected.

Whether you have symptoms or not, call ahead to the doctor’s office before you go. Make sure you wear a face mask when you go to the doctor, to prevent exposing other people to the virus.