

9 things you need to know to protect yourself and family from COVID-19 at home

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Our homes are normally where we feel most comfortable and safe. But when it comes to COVID-19, we need to think about our homes differently.

Your greatest risk of acquiring COVID-19 is in your own home, when someone you live with becomes infected. You have a 10-20 percent chance of catching COVID-19 from a COVID-positive family member or roommate. If this happens to you, Infectious Diseases specialists recommend you follow the guidelines to help stop the spread:

1. What's the difference between Isolation and Quarantine?
2. When should someone isolate?
3. What is the best way to isolate someone in your home with COVID-19?
4. Can anyone be near an infected person?
5. What about pets?
6. When do I need to quarantine if a housemate might have COVID-19?
7. How long does someone have to quarantine?
8. How do I quarantine if exposed to COVID-19 in my house?
9. What options exist for isolation outside the home?



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1. What's the difference between Isolation and Quarantine?

- **Isolation:** Separating someone who is infected so they do not make others sick.
 - **Quarantine:** Separating someone who has been exposed but is not infected, so that if they get sick they do not make others sick.
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2. When should someone isolate?

If anyone in your house develops symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, chills, cough, runny/stuff nose, sore throat, muscle aches, shortness of breath, severe fatigue, severe headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of taste or smell), they should isolate, leaving isolation only to go obtain a test for COVID-19.

If they have a negative PCR test result for COVID-19, they can leave isolation.

If the result is positive, they should isolate until they are no longer contagious, which is usually a total of 10 full days from the start of symptoms (provided fever has resolved for 24 hours and symptoms are improving). You should count the first day of symptoms as day 0 and the day of release from isolation is day 11. In some cases, such as for people with severe immune compromising conditions or severe COVID-19 requiring care in an ICU, isolation should continue through day 20.

Persons with COVID-19 should not be tested again for 90 days.

3. What is the best way to isolate someone in your home with COVID-19?

Persons who are in isolation due to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 must stay home except to receive emergency medical care.

The person with COVID-19 should stay in a separate room with the door closed, if available. Food and drink should be brought to them and left outside the door. If they are feeling sick, a baby monitor can be helpful to make sure they are safe.

The person with COVID-19 should use a separate bathroom, if available. If the infected person must be in the same room with others, everyone in the room should wear a mask. It is essential, even when wearing a mask that the person with COVID-19 stay 6 feet away from others, or the period of quarantine will have to start over for those persons exposed.

If the person with COVID-19 must share a bathroom with others, he or she should disinfect the bathroom surfaces (taps, doorknob, toilet seat/flusher, handheld shower head) with wipes or spray prior to leaving the bathroom, and the others should disinfect the surfaces prior to use. Towels, soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste should be kept separate.

Once the person with COVID-19 is in isolation, disinfect all surfaces that person may have touched, but only if others in the house are going to touch those surfaces. For example, you should disinfect high touch surfaces like phones, remote controls, counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables, but if the person is isolating somewhere other than their bedroom, you do not need to clean the area where that person normally sleeps if no one else is going to sleep there. The virus will not move from a surface or material and will die in a few days.

The person who is sick should perform hand hygiene before leaving their isolation room, before touching any shared surface such as in the bathroom, and before passing back items such as delivered plates and utensils.

Everyone else in the house should disinfect their hands often, but especially after using a bathroom shared with the infected person, or after collecting items from the isolation room. Dishes, utensils and linens can be cleaned in the usual way in the sink, dishwasher, or washing machine.

- **Wash your hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds OR
- **Use hand sanitizer** Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- **Avoid touching your eyes,** nose, and mouth or preparing food with unwashed hands.

4. Can anyone be near an infected person?

A person who has recovered from COVID-19 diagnosed in the last 90 days can safely have close contact with a person who is infected with COVID-19 and can also have close contact with people who are in quarantine.

If the person in isolation needs care, it should ideally be provided by someone who has had COVID-19 in the last 90 days, as they will not need to quarantine. If such a person does not exist, someone who has had COVID-19 more than 90 days ago or someone who has been vaccinated against COVID-19 is the next best option, as they are likely immune, though they will need to quarantine.

Care should be provided with both people wearing a mask if possible, good ventilation (e.g. open windows) and meticulous hand hygiene after.

If it is not possible to have the sick person stay in their own room, stay as far as possible from that person and improve ventilation (e.g. open windows). Both the sick person and the potential contacts should wear masks as much as possible. Masks should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is not able to remove the covering without help.

No visitors should be allowed in the home when someone is isolating.

5. What about pets?

Pets can transmit COVID-19; therefore, unfortunately a person who is in isolation should not snuggle with or touch the family pet.

6. When do I need to quarantine if a housemate might have COVID-19?

You do not need to quarantine while your sick household member is awaiting their test result, but you should be very careful with masking and distancing during that time. If someone in your household tests positive for COVID-19, you will need to quarantine if you have been a close contact, defined as:

- You were within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more.
 - You provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19.
 - You had direct physical contact with the person (hugged or kissed them).
 - You shared eating or drinking utensils.
 - They sneezed, coughed, or somehow got respiratory droplets on you.
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7. How long does someone have to quarantine?

The duration of quarantine depends on whether or not you are able to successfully avoid close contact with the infected household member while they are contagious (the period of time described above).

Each time you are in close contact with a person with COVID-19, the quarantine period starts anew with day 0. You have three options from which you can choose for the duration of quarantine:

- 14 days: You may obtain a test at any time, but are not required to do so unless you develop symptoms of COVID-19
- 10 days: You may obtain a test at any time, but are not required to do so unless you develop symptoms of COVID-19. You must self-monitor for symptoms through the end of a 14-day period.
- 7 days: If you obtain a test on or after day 5, and have a negative result in hand, you may be released after day 7. You must self-monitor for symptoms through the end of a 14-day period

8. How do I quarantine if exposed to COVID-19 in my house?

If you are in quarantine, you may still go to work if you are an essential worker but may not go anywhere else except to obtain a COVID-19 test or to receive emergency medical care.

If you develop symptoms, you should immediately isolate as above and obtain a test. Remain in isolation unless you receive a negative test result. Only if you receive a positive test result should you consider isolating together with other COVID infected people within your household.

Quarantine ideally looks just like isolation, except that in many cases you may have too many people needing to quarantine at once to give each person their own room and bathroom. Keep in mind that if you are “quarantining together,” one or more people could become infected and contagious while others may not be infected. It is, therefore, especially important to try to stay 6 feet apart from others in your household, to frequently disinfect high-touch surfaces (at least once a day), and to improve ventilation (e.g. open windows). If anyone in the household develops symptoms, they should isolate immediately and seek testing, staying isolated while awaiting test results.

No visitors should be allowed in the home when someone is quarantining.

9. What options exist for isolation outside the home?

You might be eligible to use one of the Massachusetts COVID isolation and recovery sites. Individuals must meet both clinical and financial eligibility in order to stay at an Isolation and Recovery Site.

Clinical Eligibility

Individuals must be able to safely isolate without intensive medical supervision. These sites are NOT available for individuals who:

- Require assistance with Activities of Daily Living from on-site staff; or
- Require medication administration (except for methadone); or
- Require the level of care provided at a Skilled Nursing Facility.

Financial Eligibility

Individuals in households making less than 400% of the Federal Poverty Level in need of a safe place to isolate, including but not limited to overcrowded households, living with a high risk individual (older adult, immunocompromised), etc. An annual income of 400% of the Federal Poverty Level is:

- \$51,040 for individuals
- \$68,960 for a family of 2
- \$86,880 for a family of 3
- \$104,800 for a family of 4

You can call (617) 367-5150 between the hours of 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.