

Home Care for Employees with Suspected COVID-19 Presenting with Mild Symptoms and the Management of their Contacts

For the purpose of this document, please note mild illness may include uncomplicated upper respiratory tract viral infection symptoms such as fatigue, cough, fever, nasal congestion, anorexia, muscle pain, malaise, sore throat or headache. Rarely, persons may also present with vomiting, diarrhoea, and nausea.

This guidance document provides recommendations on safe home care for employees with suspected COVID-19 who present with mild symptoms, and guidance on measures relating to the management of their contacts.

Home Care for Employees with Suspected COVID-19 who Present with Mild Symptoms

For employees presenting with mild illness, hospitalisation may not be possible because of the burden on our health care system, or required, unless there is concern about rapid deterioration. Employees with mild symptoms and without underlying chronic conditions – such as heart or lung disease, renal failure, or immunocompromising conditions – may be cared for at home.

A communication link should be established between the general practitioner (GP) and/or public health personnel for the duration of the home care period, until the employee's symptoms have completely resolved.

To prevent the risk of infection from spreading to household contacts, household members should be educated about personal hygiene, fundamental Infection and Prevention Control (IPC) measures, and how to care safely for the person suspected of having COVID-19. From here forth in this document, the employee will now be referred to as the 'patient'. Household members should adhere to the following recommendations:

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Island Cross, Little Island, Cork - Tel: 021 4355917

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- ✓ Position the patient with mild symptoms in a well-ventilated single room, with open windows etc.
- ✓ Restrict movements of the patient in the house and limit shared space. Ensure that shared spaces (i.e. bathrooms and kitchen) are clean, disinfected daily and are well ventilated (keep windows open, i.e. using a window snaplock).
- ✓ If possible, household members should stay in a different room. If this is not possible, maintain a distance of at least 1 metre from the patient.
- ✓ Ideally, assign one person and one person only, who is in good health and has no underlying illnesses to care for the patient.
- ✓ Wash hands after any type of contact with the patient or their immediate environment. Remember, hand washing should be performed after using the toilet, whenever hands are dirty, before and after preparing food, and before eating. It is preferable to use disposable paper towels to dry hands when washing hands with soap and water. If disposable paper towels are not available, use clean cloths and replace them regularly.
- ✓ To control respiratory secretions, a medical mask should be worn by the patient and changed daily. If medical masks are not available, ensure the individual covers the nose and mouth with a disposable paper tissue when coughing or sneezing. Masks should not be touched or handled during use. When removing the mask, use the appropriate technique – that is, do not touch the front of the mask, but instead untie it. Place the mask in the bin immediately after use and wash hands.
- ✓ Never reuse masks or gloves.
- ✓ Use dedicated cutlery for the patient. These items should be cleaned thoroughly after use and can be re-used instead of being discarded.
- ✓ Clean and disinfect surfaces daily that are repeatedly touched in the room where the patient is being cared for. Household detergent or soap should be used first for cleaning, and then, after rinsing, household disinfectant should be applied.
- ✓ Clean and disinfect toilet surfaces and bathrooms at least once daily. Again, household detergent or soap should be used first for cleaning, and then, after rinsing, household disinfectant should be applied.

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- ✓ Clean the patients hand towels, clothes and bed linen using a machine wash at 60–90 °C with common household detergent, and dry thoroughly. Contaminated materials should not come into contact with skin and clothes.
- ✓ Gloves should be used when cleaning surfaces or handling clothing or linen soiled with body fluids. Before putting on and after removing gloves, hands must be washed.
- ✓ Masks, gloves and other waste during home care should be placed into a bin with a lid in the patient’s designated room before disposing of it as infectious waste.
- ✓ Do not share drinks, cutlery, towels, bed linen, or wash cloths with the patient and avoid other types of exposure to contaminated items from the patient’s room.
- ✓ Where testing is not possible to confirm patients to be released from home isolation, the World Health Organisation recommends that patients remain isolated for an additional two weeks after symptoms have resolved.

Management of the Patient’s Contacts

Individuals who have been exposed to persons with suspected COVID-19 are considered ‘contacts’ and are advised to monitor their health for 14 days from the last day of possible contact.

A contact is an individual who is involved in any of the following from 2 days before and up to 14 days after the onset of symptoms in the patient:

- ✓ Having face-to-face contact with a COVID-19 patient within a distance of 1 meter and for a duration greater than 15 minutes.
- ✓ Providing direct care for a COVID-19 patient without using personal protective equipment (PPE).
- ✓ Sharing the same close environment as a COVID-19 patient (including being at the same gathering or sharing a household, classroom or workplace) for any amount of time.
- ✓ Travelling in a close proximity (within a distance of 1 metre) with a COVID-19 patient in any kind of transport.

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If a contact develops mild symptoms, the following measures should be taken:

- ✓ Contact the receiving medical centre, hospital or COVID-19 testing centre that a symptomatic contact will be arriving.
- ✓ The contact should wear a medical mask if possible while seeking care.
- ✓ The contact should avoid taking public transportation where possible to receive medical help.
- ✓ The symptomatic contact is advised to perform hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene procedures and to stand or sit at a distance greater than 1 metre from others when in transit and when in the medical centre, hospital or COVID-19 testing centre.
- ✓ Any surfaces that become soiled with body fluids or respiratory secretions during transport should be cleaned with detergent or soap and then disinfected with a regular household bleach product.

Advice and support are available from **THE FOOD SAFETY COMPANY** at 021 4355917.

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