

## HOME CARE PRELIMINARY GUIDELINES

30-03-2020

These guidelines provide recommendations for home care of COVID-19 patients presenting with mild signs and symptoms of Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) and to avoid transmission among contacts.

In order to opt for the home care of patients with COVID-19, the following conditions must be met:

1. The patient has an Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) With No Signs of Severe Disease and is stable in order to receive care at home.
2. There is a household member with low risk for COVID-19 (age less than 50 years, no co-morbidities/chronic diseases, and non-smoker) that can provide adequate care for at least 14 days.
3. There is access to a telephone or to internet at home, to ensure continuity of the daily surveillance established by the Ministry of Health for 14 days.
4. Within the house, there is a separate room with good ventilation and ideally, with a bathroom that is for exclusive use by the patient with COVID-19.
5. There are household resources available in order to gain access to food and other necessities.
6. Both the patient and the caregiver have the minimum protective equipment required, such as disposable surgical masks and gloves, and both demonstrate they understand the importance of biosafety norms for (respiratory hygiene, coughing and sneezing etiquette, hand washing, disposal of single-use material) and express commitment to their strict implementation.
7. There is no one in the household with high risk for complications due to COVID-19, such as older adults (age 60 and older) and persons with chronic communicable diseases, chronic non-communicable diseases (hypertension, type 2 diabetes or DM2, cardiovascular disease, asthma, chronic bronchitis, chronic kidney disease or CKD) or immunosuppression.

In order to guarantee their personal well-being and that of their family and neighbors, persons with COVID-19 and Acute Respiratory Infection With No Signs of Severe Disease who do not meet the above-listed conditions shall be referred to [an](#) Intermediate Care Unit for persons with COVID-19 designated by Ministry of Health and COPECO in each city.

### RISK OF INFECTION BY COVID-19

Even if the diagnosed person has a mild or moderate ARI/acute respiratory infection or is asymptomatic, household members, partners and caregivers of a patient with COVID-19 assigned to home care are at high-risk of acquiring the infection. For this reason,

biosafety norms should be strictly followed and controlled at home; in the event that any other household member develops ARI signs and symptoms, they should immediately start wearing a mask and this situation should be reported to the healthcare personnel that does the follow-up of the diagnosed case.

### **DAILY FOLLOW-UP OF THE PRESENCE OF SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF AN ACUTE RESPIRATORY INFECTION WITH SIGNS OF SEVERE DISEASE**

At least every 24 hours, healthcare personnel will do follow-up of a COVID-19 case assigned to home care, to verify the presence or absence of signs and symptoms of a severe ARI in the patient:

1. Temperature  $\geq 40$  °C
2. Respiratory rate > 20/minute
3. Pleuritic chest pain (pain when a person breathes)
4. Dyspnea (difficult to inspire and expire)
5. Altered consciousness
6.  $PO_2 < 90$

With the presence of two or more of these signs, the patient must be reported to a Health Unit or call 911 in order to be evaluated by a doctor.

### **HYGIENE AT HOME**

In addition to an exclusively designated room, the person with COVID-19 should have exclusive use of designated cups, plates, forks, spoons, knives, bed linens, towels and any other article they use for personal hygiene and care.

All home surfaces should be cleaned with a chlorine-based solution (at 0.1% equivalent to 1000 ppm) or with a disinfectant: floor, doors, doorknobs, toilet, shower, sink, mirrors, utensils used by the person with COVID-19. When cleaning surfaces contaminated with sputum, blood or any other body fluid, special precautions should be taken and disposable gloves should be used.

Utensils and clothes contaminated with sputum, blood or any other body fluid should be removed immediately and washed. If a washer is available, these garments should be washed without being mixed with those of other household members. If washed by hand, use disposable gloves and take precautions to avoid skin contact with contaminated clothes.

Used disposable materials, such as gloves and masks, and any other waste materials produced by the person with COVID-19 should be put immediately in a red bag (provided

by Ministry of Health or any other available plastic bag), which must be kept sealed at all times and in the patient's exclusive room until the moment of its collection by health personnel for final disposal.

## **GENERAL HOME CARE**

Limit the movement of a person with COVID-19 in the house and minimize their sharing of spaces. Ensuring that shared spaces (bathrooms, kitchen, dining room, living room) have good lighting.

If a designated room for exclusive their use is not available, ensure that at least a one meter of person-to-person distance is maintained at home. The person with COVID-19 must sleep on a separate bed.

Limit the number of caregivers, ideally to a single one; this must be a person with low risk. No visitors will be allowed for a 14-day period, at a minimum.

Household members must adequately wash their hands for at least 20 seconds, ideally with water and soap, and in the following situations:

1. Before and after preparing meals
2. Before meals
3. After using the bathroom and/or toilet
4. If they have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19

The caregiver should wash their hands after each contact with the person or with the utensils or articles used by the person with COVID-19.

Hands should be dried with disposable towels. If none are available, regular towels may be used, but these should be changed every day.

Bathrooms and toilets must be washed and disinfected at least once a day. They should first be washed with soap or detergent and then be disinfected with a chlorine-based solution (at 0.1%, equivalent to 1000 ppm) or with disinfectant.

## **USE AND CARE OF MASKS**

To contain contamination from respiratory secretions, the patient with COVID-19 must use a disposable surgical mask permanently. Coughing or sneezing should be covered with their flexed elbow. The person with COVID-19 should change their mask every eight

hours, as long as it does not get damp from secretions. In this case, the mask must be changed immediately.

The caregiver and any other household member must use a mask when they are in the same room as the person infected with COVID-19.

Special care must be taken when removing the mask, not touching the front part as it is considered a contaminated zone.

Masks and gloves should not be reused; once removed, they must be immediately placed in a red bag used for disposal of wastes with biological contamination.

## **ENDING THE HOME ISOLATION**

WHO recommends that a person's isolation at home can end when their (PCR) antigen tests have negative results in two samples with at least 24 hours difference. If tests are not available, home isolation may be discontinued two weeks after the end of respiratory symptoms.

## **TREATMENT FOR THE PERSON WITH COVID-19 ACUTE RESPIRATORY INFECTION WITHOUT SIGNS OF SEVERE DISEASE**

At this moment, there is neither a specific treatment for COVID-19 nor a vaccine for its prevention. Therefore, treatment is symptomatic.

1. There should be no self-medication
2. Antibiotics and other medications must be used only when prescribed by medical staff.
3. Balanced nutrition with abundant vegetables and fresh fruits are recommended, taking abundant liquids; and when an analgesic is needed, acetaminophen (paracetamol) should be used.

## **MANAGEMENT OF CONTACTS**

All persons that have been exposed to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 are considered contacts; their health status should be monitored for 14 days, from the moment of contact, in any of the following situations:

1. Having face-to-face contact with a diagnosed case of COVID-19 with a distance of less than one meter, for more than 15 minutes.
2. Providing healthcare to a diagnosed case of COVID-19 without using adequate personal protection equipment or without following biosafety norms.
3. Sharing an enclosed environment, for any amount of time, with a diagnosed case of COVID-19, such as: worksite, classroom, home or any other circumstance that reduces the distance between persons.
4. Traveling close to (distance less than one meter) a diagnosed case of COVID-19.

If a contact develops signs and symptoms of an ARI, the following actions should be taken immediately:

1. Put a mask on for permanent use
2. Notify corresponding authorities for COVID-19 testing
3. Transfer if needed, through authorized transportation means, following biosafety measures and avoiding public transportation
4. Adopt all biosafety and respiratory hygiene measures immediately and keep a distance of one meter from other persons.

## **HOME CARE RESPONSIBILITIES OF HEALTHCARE PERSONNEL**

Take the epidemiological surveillance file and follow up with each home-care patient for the required time period.

Provide disposable masks, gloves and bleach, as well as the red bags for management of contaminated biological material.

Secure logistics for immediate transfer of the home care patients that develop symptoms and signs of severe ARI.

## **REFERENCES**

1. World Health Organization. Home care for patients with COVID-19 presenting with mild symptoms and management of their contacts. WHO reference number: WHO/nCov/IPC/HomeCare/2020.3. Interim Guidance, 17 March 2020.
2. Interim Guidance for Implementing Home Care of People Not Requiring Hospitalization for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Updated February 12, 2020

3. COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
4. [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/clinical-criteria.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/clinical-criteria.html)
5. Real time map, John Hopkins University:  
<https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>
6. PAHO / WHO has the following online sites for updates on COVID-19:
  - <https://www.campusvirtualesp.org/es/curso/virus-respiratorios-emergentes-incluido-el-2019-ncov-metodos-de-deteccion-prevencion-respuesta>
  - [www.oms.org](http://www.oms.org)
  - [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
  - <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>