- Virus

HOW TO CARE FOR A COVID PATIENT AT HOME

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In this pandemic, one of the best defenses against catching COVID-19 is staying home. Ironically, it's also the way some people get infected. Who doesn't know of a friend, parent, or grandparent who never left the house since the lockdown in 2020, yet tested positive for the new coronavirus?

"All it takes is one family member to unintentionally bring the coronavirus into the home," says Marion Kwek, MD, infectious diseases specialist at Makati Medical Center (MakatiMed). "In a place where face masks go off and social distancing measures are eased, the virus has a greater chance of spreading."

What to do when a member of the family has COVID-19, when hospitals are operating beyond capacity?

MakatiMed's Section of Infectious Diseases walks you through the process of caring for a family member—and yourself—when he or she is experiencing mild symptoms of the coronavirus.

Isolate the family member. Ideally, a COVID patient should be in his or her own room with its own bathroom for the prescribed period of isolation. "If that's not possible, limit your movements in shared spaces, like the kitchen or bathroom, with all household members wearing a mask," Kwek advises. "Avoid eating at the same time. Constantly clean these spaces, as well as high-touch surfaces, like doorknobs, light switches, faucets, electronic devices."

Inform a doctor. "Explain the patient's symptoms in detail so your family physician or health-care front-liner can prescribe the appropriate medications," says Kwek. "Do not give medicine that other people take, that you just read about online, or that was not recommended by a doctor."

Prepare supplies. The patient should have his or her own utensils, plate, glass, toiletries, medicines and vitamins, food, drink, face mask and shield, and even dishwashing soap and sponge. Make sure to separate his or her laundry from the rest of the family.

Advise BHERT. Your Barangay Health Emergency Response Team (BHERT) must be alerted of a COVID-19-positive family member even if he or she does not have symptoms or is experiencing only mild symptoms. BHERTs can facilitate transfers to treatment and monitoring facilities should the need arise.

Become a contact tracer. "Call the people your COVID-19-positive family member was last seen with to make them aware that they were exposed to the virus," says Kwek. "These people may want to undergo a swab test to find out if they are positive, so they can have appropriate care, and for them to also trace the people they may have come in contact with. Regardless of the test result, they should still quarantine for 14 days from the date of the last

exposure to a confirmed case, to monitor for symptoms and prevent others around them from potential infection."

Create a healthy environment. Make sure the patient's room is well ventilated and has sunlight. Provide nutritious food as well. "Fruits and vegetables are loaded with vitamins and minerals to strengthen the body's immune system," Kwek points out. "Fighting a fever can also dehydrate a person. Supply the patient with regular fluids, from water to natural fruit juices."

Protect yourself. "Wear a disposable mask and gloves if you have to deal directly with the patient, and don't forget to throw away the mask and gloves with every use," Kwek says. Also, wash and sanitize your hands thoroughly and frequently. And even if you're all masked up, always maintain a distance of at least 6 feet (2 meters) from the patient. "Don't neglect yourself," she adds. "Eat nutritious food, supplement your meals with vitamins, exercise regularly and get adequate sunlight and fresh air, and give yourself time to rest and recharge."

Protect others. "Your exposure makes you a potential carrier of the virus," Kwek says. "Limit, if not avoid altogether, prolonged face-to-face encounters with the rest of the family members, friends and outsiders to prevent them from possible infection."

Recognize warning signs. While majority have mild symptoms, there are those who can progress to more severe COVID-19. Seek emergency medical care immediately if your family member has trouble breathing or is breathing very fast, has persistent chest pain, is unable to stay awake, or has pale lips or nail beds. A home pulse oximeter can also be used to monitor a patient's oxygen status. Decreasing levels to less than 94 percent in those with previously normal readings is a warning sign of disease progression and would require additional medical intervention.

MakatiMed now offers TeleMD consultation services to help people manage mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms. Tel. 88888999 local 2189 or 2832; email MMCHealthHub@makatmed.net.ph.