

## **Transcript: Ask Dr Jaya – How can we care for someone with COVID at home?**

**Sonny Krishnan:** My first question, can someone who has been tested positive for Covid-19 be cared for at home?

**Dr Jaya Shreedhar:** The short answer is, it depends.

As we know, people with no symptoms and some people with mild and moderate symptoms and others with severe symptoms, so those people with no symptoms should be able to stay at home provided they can be adequately isolated from the house members. But I believe this should be confirmed by the family doctor. And based on the doctor's advice, the person can stay at home.

Someone with a mild to moderate disease can also be considered for home care. But that comes with a whole bunch of caveats. Let's look at these.

So someone with mild and moderate disease, if they're under the age of 60, if they don't have what are known as risk factors, let me list those out. They shouldn't smoke. They shouldn't be obese and not have other diseases, such as heart disease or diabetes or chronic lung disease, for instance, or cancer or immunosuppression or be on immunosuppressant drugs because of an organ donation or something like that, or if a very, very elderly or if they have chronic disease of the kidneys.

So these are a list of risk factors which might not make it safe for someone with mild or moderate disease, even, to be cared for at home. We need to really assess all of these risk factors and take into consideration the person's symptoms, their medical history, and also look at something really important – which is the practical ability of the family to manage care for that person at home.

For instance, household members need to sort of limit the amount of time they spend together in a shared space. They need to know how to practice hygiene around the person with mild to moderate Covid-19 and they should know how to recognize any signs of worsening health in that person.

Trained health workers will also need to assess whether the home itself is suitable for the isolation and care of someone with Covid-19 in a way that they are capable of following proper infection control measures. And you also need for that household to be easily accessible by trained health workers in case the patient needs some support and whether the person can be connected by phone, for instance, for telemedicine consultation, whether the person can be reached by an ambulance service or any outreach.

So these are all the factors that go into an assessment of whether someone with Covid-19 can be cared for at all at home.

**Sonny:** Thank you, Dr Jaya. What should be done to prevent other people in the house from becoming sick if a person with Covid-19 is being cared for at home?

**Dr Jaya:** There are precautions that a family can take. Let's say someone in the house has Covid-19 that person should be able to stay in a separate room of his or her own. And if it's not possible, because I know many of us live in households in one large room or just a couple of rooms, then keep a distance of about a meter, at least, from the person with Covid-19.

Additionally, provide as good ventilation as possible and keep the windows open. The person with Covid-19 has to observe certain precautions. Let's look at the most important one – that is wearing a mask. It'll prevent the transmission of infection from that person to the other members of the household. Others too, if they wore masks, could minimize that risk to practically nothing.

Visitors are ideally to be kept away. The person who's caring for someone with Covid-19 at home should be just the one person instead of different people taking turns so that you limit the risk of exposure to a number of household members. Just keep the risk to only one person. Ideally, the person who's ill with Covid-19 should have their own bed linen, their own towels, their own eating utensils, which should be washed and kept separately and not shared.

Any surfaces that the person with Covid-19 touches around the house, like a refrigerator or a countertop or a tabletop should ideally be wiped down with disinfectant.

Everyone in the household should ideally follow precaution measures with proper coughing and sneezing etiquette, washing hands with soap and water regularly, also washing hands during and after preparing food and before sitting down to eat. Also, definitely, wash your hands after using the toilet before and after caring for the person who's got Covid-19.

And also, if your hands look visibly dirty, go ahead. Don't skimp on water and wash thoroughly for 20 seconds. People in the household who have a cold or who are coughing and sneezing should ideally use the crook of the elbow to cover the mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing. And then you just do it by quickly swinging your hand up to the opposite shoulder, bending down into the back of your elbow and sneezing or coughing into that space.

If you're using a disposable tissue. Make sure that you dispose of that tissue very carefully inside a wastebasket where children cannot get at it. And any waste material that's used to care for the person with Covid-19, say it's disinfectant wipes or masks and so forth that should be carefully disposed off in a strong bag and tied tightly and disposed separately.

**Sonny:** How do you protect yourself while caring for someone with Covid-19 at home?

**Dr Jaya:** This is an important question. It's important to do that in a way that's not stigmatizing or hurtful to the person who's got the illness and in line with the basic precautions that the CDC Centers for Disease Control in the United States and the World Health Organization recommend.

And let's look at those very, very simple instructions as much as possible.

Keep your hands clean. Keep them away from your face. It's common practice to unconsciously touch our faces several times a day. So we have to be mindful about it. If possible, write out a placard and stick it up somewhere in your kitchen or somewhere where you're likely to look at – a reminder to keep your hands away from your face. It's important to keep your hands clean and away from your face.

Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after being in close contact or in the same room as the person with Covid-19. And if soap and water aren't immediately available, you can use the hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Avoid touching your mucous membranes, namely the eyes – rubbing your eyes or putting your finger anywhere into your nostrils and also your mouth.

It's important to consider wearing a face mask. If you need to be in the same room with a person who's sick, and she or he isn't able to wear a face mask, you must definitely wear yours.

Stay at least about a meter to two meters away from the person with Covid-19. And don't touch your mask when you're using it. If it's a disposable mask, throw it away safely in a waste basket and wash your hands after you do that. It's important to keep the household clean, so clean your home frequently use cleaning sprays or wipes or soap and water on surfaces such as countertops, tabletops and doorknobs.

Don't clean the secure room and bathroom with the same material that you use to clean the rest of the house. Keep that material separate. The washing and wiping cloths are separate for that person. Set aside the bedding and utensils for the sick person only to use.

These are ways in which you can keep the household safer.

And a word on the laundry. Don't shake out the dirty laundry because droplets on the bed linens will fly up into the air and can be inhaled by other members of the household who will then be infected. Use regular detergent to wash the sick person's laundry and use the warmest setting that you can wash your hands thoroughly after you put the clothes in the dryer. Thoroughly dry the fluids, if possible, in sunlight.

And if you're handling clothing that's been soiled by the sick person, if there's some blood or mucus or fecal matter, wear disposable gloves and keep the items away from your body. Wash your hands thoroughly after removing the gloves and put the dirty gloves and the masks in a wastebin with a lid.

And as I mentioned before, it's nice to have visitors. It's lovely to have friends and neighbors who are concerned. But when you have someone with Covid-19 at home that you're taking care of it's good to pass on a friendly message to ask neighbors and visitors and relatives to just hold on for a few weeks till the person gets better. Also, if one of the visitors is asymptomatic, it'll minimize the risk of the infection to you and other members of the household.

**Sonny:** Dr Jaya, how long should people with Covid-19 stay at home and in isolation?

People with covid-19, who you are taking care of at home, should be in isolation until they are no longer able to give the virus to others. And that means at least 10 days after the first day that they develop symptoms such as a cough or a fever or body ache and add on another three days after the symptoms go away where they don't have fever or any other respiratory symptoms, such as sneezing or coughing. So that's about a total of roughly a couple of weeks.

And if people with Covid-19 who've tested positive actually don't develop any symptoms, remember, they are still shedding the virus and are infectious to people around them. So they should stay isolated for a minimum of 10 days. The safest is two weeks right from the day they tested positive.

**Sonny:** Finally, what do we need to look out for in terms of Covid-19 warning signs in order to seek emergency medical care immediately for the person, if the person needs in-home care?

This is a really important question and the information that we are going to share here can save the person's life.

So the most important thing is to monitor the person in your household who has Covid-19 and monitor your own self, who's caring for that person and monitor the other members of the household as well for any signs of infection or worsening symptoms. If the person who has been diagnosed with Covid-19 appears to be getting sick or appears to have worsening symptoms call your doctor at once. And if the person has certain emergency warning signs, such as trouble breathing, you know, chest pain or feel pressure in the chest, sounds confused, has a bluish tinge on the lips or the face

appears slightly off color and blue, feels drowsy and doesn't seem to respond when you ask them or talk to them, these are all emergency signs. The person needs immediate attention in a health facility. That's when you can call your local emergency number or 911 particularly if the person is not waking up and so on. So remember, when a person develops emergency warning signs of worsening symptoms of Covid-19, the quicker you act, the more likely that you can save the life of your loved one.

**Sonny:** Thank you Dr Jaya. This podcast has been brought to you by Internews' Rooted in Trust project supported by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.