

COVID-19 Guidance for In-Home Caregivers with Limited Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

This harm-reduction guidance is based off of [recommendations from the SEIU 775 Benefits Group](#). It is for healthcare providers working for in-home service agencies and people caring for household members who are sick with COVID-19.

The actions offered in this document may help caregivers reduce their risk of infection without PPE. This guidance can serve as a resource until PPE supplies are available. **Disclaimer:** None of the below alternatives offer the same protections of PPE and some may not offer protection at all.

The Department of Health also has [COVID-19 guidance for caregivers](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has contingency and crisis capacity strategies to optimize supplies of PPE that include: [eye protection](#), [isolation gowns](#), [facemasks](#), and [other forms of PPE](#) in healthcare settings when there is limited supply.

Facemasks and Alternatives

- If more than one face mask is available, but the supply is very limited, implement limited re-use of facemasks. This is the practice of using the same facemask by one caregiver for multiple encounters with different patients but removing it after each encounter.
 - Do not touch outer surfaces of the mask during care. Mask removal and replacement must be done in a careful manner.
- If only one mask is available, have the sick client wear it.
- If no masks are available, consider excluding caregivers at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 from caring for sick clients.
 - Those at higher risk: Older age, have chronic medical conditions, or may be pregnant.
- If no masks are available, coach clients on cough hygiene.
 - In the absence of a mask, the client needs to add a barrier between the caregiver and their cough, such as wearing a bandana or covering cough with a sheet or blanket.
- [CDC recommends caregivers wear bandanas and scarves for protection in a last resort option](#). They will not stop the spread of the virus, but may limit the distance of spread.
- Caregivers can make homemade masks using materials (antimicrobial pillowcases or tea towels) that can be fashioned into masks. Makeshift masks are likely to offer better protection than no barrier at all. Surgical masks or respirators are more effective and superior at filtering out viruses.
- A full list of [crisis capacity strategies for the use of facemasks is found on the CDC website](#). Crisis capacity strategies are not equal with U.S. standards of care, but these

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measures, or a combination of these measures, may need to be considered during periods of known shortages.

Protective Barriers for the Body

- If you don't have a gown to wear, you can use ponchos, plastic rain coats, or trash bags.
 - Trash bags: Use two of them. Cut leg holes in one and cinch at the waist. Use another bag to cut head and arm holes.
 - Do not touch furniture or other items in the house with your clothing or coverings after exposure to your sick client.
 - A full list of [crisis capacity strategies for the use of isolation gowns is found on the CDC website](#).
- Use other coverings to cover exposed areas if needed. (plastic bags, saran wrap, etc.)
- Remove soiled clothes or coverings by pulling the item away from the neck and shoulders while touching the inside of the item only. Dispose of all single-use items (gloves, gown, etc.) in a sealed trash bag. Wash all your clothing after you finish caring for the client. Wear new clothes with each new client you provide care to.
- Bring an extra change of clothes and shoes (more, if you have multiple clients or house visits). Make sure you place your clean clothes in an area away from the sick client. When you are done taking care of the client, change into your clean clothes and shoes. Place your soiled items into a trash bag to be washed.
- The shoes you provide care in should not be worn outside the location where you are caring for your sick client. Disinfect your shoes before using them in a new setting.
 - Leave shoes outdoors for 72 hours and then wipe with disinfectant, including sole of shoe, before using again.
- If you don't have eye protection or a face shield, you can wear goggles from a hardware store. Safety glasses used in a lab, for yard work, or regular eyeglasses that do not impede your vision are okay to use. These goggles will not fully protect your face and eyes from exposure, but it may reduce the level of exposure.
 - The goal is to make sure you can see well while creating a barrier between you and the virus. This also serves as a reminder to not touch your eyes.
 - A full list of [crisis capacity strategies for the use of eye protection is found on the CDC website](#).
- If you don't have latex or nitrile gloves, you can use kitchen gloves and dispose of them after use with each client. You can also use garden gloves, but wash them after each use.

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Behavioral Guidance for the Home Care Setting

- Engage in minimal contact with soiled items.
 - If you carry dirty sheets in a laundry basket, make sure you clean it with soap and water and then disinfect the basket after. Place clean laundry in a clean and disinfected basket.
- Minimize the transfer of individual objects. Use a tray to hand off items. Hand off a thermometer to the client instead of placing it in their mouth.
- Maintain physical distance from your client as much as you can while still delivering care. Stand 6 feet away when you talk to a sick client.

Environmental Strategies

- Open a window to increase airflow and ventilation when you care for a client with COVID-19.
- Keep your sick client in their own bedroom and away from others. If you can, have the sick client use a separate bathroom.

Disinfection and Hand Hygiene Guidance

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is the gold standard. A second but less preferred option is to use a hand gel that has at least 60% alcohol.
- Clean all surfaces with soap and water and then disinfect. The coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is killed by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered cleaning products. Use these approved cleaning products. The label will have an emerging viral pathogen claim. Read the label and follow the directions on how to use it.
 - Here is the EPA [list of registered cleaning products](#) labeled for use against the new coronavirus. **Note:** There may be more cleaning products that meet EPA standards that are not on this list. The EPA updates the list often.
 - You can also use bleach diluted in water (1/3 cup bleach per gallon of water)
- Clean and disinfect the room of someone who has been sick before others are allowed to use the room again. Scrub down all surfaces with warm soap and water first and then disinfect the surfaces.
- A paper towel dipped in 60% or greater isopropyl alcohol will kill the virus. If you don't have a disinfectant with you, you can create a disinfectant by squeezing hand gel (that contains 60% alcohol in it) onto a paper towel. You can then use this on surfaces like doorknobs and toilet and sink handles. Scrubbing with warm soap and water after disinfecting can be used as an additional precaution.

More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

The risk of COVID-19 is not connected to race, ethnicity or nationality. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

Have more questions about COVID-19? Call our hotline: **1-800-525-0127**. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. (Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.

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