

Planning Steps for Patients & Families During the COVID-19 Crisis

The global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic presents new challenges. It is important to think in advance about what you would want if you get sick with Coronavirus. This includes the kind of care you would want if you were hospitalized and how to prepare for a hospital stay.

We are all in this together. By taking steps to plan now, you can help your family, friends, and medical providers.

Stop the spread

Everyone should practice social distancing, wash hands often, and cover coughs and sneezes. This means:

- You must follow any “stay-at-home” advisories from your state, city, or town.
- Stay in touch with friends and family over the phone, video, and other social media.
- People may look well and feel well and still be able to spread the virus.
- If you have children, do your best to keep them healthy and active, but please remember playgrounds are closed for a good reason. Kids should only spend time with their siblings and immediate family.
- When you have to leave home to shop for groceries and other essentials, try to shop at times when stores are not crowded. Wash your hands before and after handling items in stores, and after you leave.
- Stay healthy - get exercise, take walks, spend time outside every day. Try to stay at least 6 feet away from people outside your family when you do spend time outside. Take good care of yourself.
- Everyone should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in a trash can lined with a disposable bag. Then, immediately wash hands. Cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow if a tissue is not available.
- Everyone should wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Rub the fronts and backs of hands, and the spaces between all fingers, the whole time. Then rinse with water. If soap and water are not available, clean hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of each hand, and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when around others. You could spread COVID-19 to others even if you do not feel sick. Everyone should wear a cloth face cover when they have to go out in public, for example to the grocery store or to pick up other necessities. Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

Your Medications

- Make a list of your medications (name, dose, etc.) and keep it on hand.
- Plan for refills, and contact your clinic, hospital, or pharmacy now.
- Call your pharmacy to see if your medicines can be sent to your home.

Your Money and Bills

- Choose someone you trust who could help with your money and bills.
 - Make sure they know how to access your financial information and accounts, including passwords.
- Beware of scams. Do not give strangers information about your money.
- If you receive Social Security, your money will still come (www.ssa.gov/coronavirus/).
- The Patient Advocate Foundation can help you find resources to help lessen the financial burden of medical treatment (<https://www.patientadvocate.org>).

Your Pets

- Choose someone who could take care of your pets.
 - Make sure they have the name of your vet, instructions on caring for your pet, and a list of your pet's medical issues.
 - Give them a house key, in case they need to get in to care for your pet.
- Ask your pet store to deliver pet food and supplies, or use an online ordering service (e.g., Chewy.com).

Your Medical Care Plan: Three Action Steps

1. Share your wishes about the care you want.

This is MOST important.

- Think about what is most important in your life: family, pets, hobbies, etc.:
 - **Cake** is a planning tool that can help you explore, document, and share all your health, legal, funeral, and legacy decisions (www.joinCake.com).
 - This can be a difficult exercise, but planning can make it easier for your family to make decisions, if necessary.
- Think about what you want for your medical care:
 - Talk with your health care proxy (medical decision maker), family or friends, as well as your medical provider, about the care you want.
 - **Prepare for your Care** is a website that shows you how to have these conversations (www.prepareforyourcare.org).
- Consider sharing your wishes with your health care proxy (medical decision maker) and others by phone and/or a selfie video. You can also talk to others by video call:
 - Whats App (www.whatsapp.com); Zoom (<https://zoom.us>); Skype (<https://skype.com>) or FaceTime (a video-call feature on an Apple devices).
 - Download and complete the Massachusetts Medical Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment form (<https://www.molst-ma.org/>)

2. Choose a “medical decision maker” (health care proxy)

- This person will speak for you if you cannot speak for yourself due to a medical condition. Choose a back-up medical decision maker, if you are able.
- They can make sure your doctors know about the care you want.
- Keep their phone numbers on hand.
- A good medical decision maker is someone who:
 - Can talk to your doctors in person or by phone.
 - Knows your wishes about the care you want and do not want.
 - You trust to follow your wishes.
- Let your medical decision maker know you chose them for this role.
- Prepare for Your Care can help prepare you for these discussions (www.prepareforyourcare.org).

3. Consider completing an “Advance Directive”

- This form allows you to name your decision maker and write down what you want for your medical care, in case you cannot speak for yourself due to a medical condition.
- If you already have an advance directive, review it, update it, and share it with your health care proxy (medical decision maker) and your medical provider.
- Advance Directive forms are available at Prepare for Your Care (<https://prepareforyourcare.org/advance-directive>).
 - It is OK if you can’t sign the form or get witnesses right now.
 - Reading the form can help you think through what kind of care you want.
 - Filling out the form can help your family and providers know more about the care you want and do not want.
- You can scan/fax, email, or even send a picture of the form from your cell phone to your health care proxy (medical decision maker), medical provider, and others whom you trust.

Hospital Stay and New Hospital Policies

A hospitalization during the Coronavirus pandemic may be quite different from what patients and families are used to. Things that may be different:

- You may not be able to talk to your regular doctor in person, only by phone.
- No visitors will be allowed except in special circumstances.
- You may be taken to a hospital other than the one where you usually get your care.

Sometimes patients need to be in the intensive care unit and put on a breathing machine (ventilator) when they are hospitalized with Coronavirus.

- Research shows that most people who require a ventilator will need to stay on it for several weeks, possibly more.
- People on a ventilator are not able to talk.

It is helpful to prepare a list, in advance, of what you would need to bring from home. The following suggestions will help you get started.

- **Papers and information:**

- Phone numbers, key contacts to give your medical providers, including the person(s) you designate as your medical decision maker(s) (*see Step 2, above*)
 - List of your medications (or bring the pill bottles)
 - Advance directive or medical wishes information (*see Step 3 above*)
 - Plans for your pets or bills
- **Equipment:**
 - **Phone, tablet and/or computer and their chargers.** These devices can help you stay connected to family and friends
 - Glasses, hearing aids, dentures, and other such items
 - Ear plugs, sleep masks, books, and clothing

Links to More Information and Resources

Additional guidance for you and your family on preventing the spread of Covid-19 can be found on the [CDC website](#). Helpful materials on safely caring for a sick family member at home are also available at the links below:

- [Caring for Yourself or a Family Member with Covid-19.](#)
- [Home precautions.](#)
- [Preventing spread of virus](#)
- [How to clean and disinfect your home](#)
- [Symptoms of Coronavirus](#)
- [Are You At Higher Risk for Severe Illness?](#)
- [Preventing getting sick](#)
- **Family Conversation Support Tools: Determining the Care You Want**
 - Prepare for Your Care: Step-by-step program with videos
<https://prepareforyourcare.org/welcome>
 - Cake: Explore, document, and share health, legal, funeral, and legacy decisions in an end-of-life plan
www.joinCake.com
 - Hello conversation game from Common Practice
<https://commonpractice.com>
 - Respecting Choices COVID-19 Resources
<https://respectingchoices.org/covid-19-resources>
 - Can We Talk About What Matters to Me? Tip sheet from National Patient Advocate Foundation
<https://www.npaf.org/can-we-talk/>

- **Additional Support Tools**

- National Patient Advocate Foundation COVID-19 Action Center: Advocacy and policy information
<https://www.npaf.org/patients-and-caregivers/covid19/>
- Patient Advocate Foundation: Resources and services to guide patients and families through complex health care challenges
<https://www.patientadvocate.org/>
- Staying Calm and Strong in the Shadow of COVID-19: Courageous Parents Network Video
<https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/cpn-talks-with-counselor-mary-frances-garber-on-staying-calm-and-strong-in-the-shadow-of-covid>

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