Self-Care Guidance for Staff during COVID-19

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory virus. It is highly contagious and is thought to spread by respiratory droplets. Symptoms include fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, and sometimes gastrointestinal symptoms such as decreased appetite, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Recent studies have also reported some people have a decreased sense of taste and smell. Symptoms usually appear 2-14 days after exposure and can range from mild to severe. However, some people are asymptomatic but can still transmit the disease to others.

Strategies for safety/Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Hand hygiene decreases risk of spreading the virus. Staff and any others entering the building need to increase frequency of hand washing. Soap and water is preferred, but alcohol-based hand gel is effective.

Nursing facilities should follow the ISDH, CDC, and facility guidelines for wearing PPE (see link in references). Direct care staff need to wear a face mask at all times while in the building. Non-sterile gloves should be worn when entering residents’ room and providing direct care. Gowns, goggles, and face shields should be worn in accordance with ISDH and facility guidelines. Hand hygiene must be performed before donning and after doffing PPE. It is also recommended to perform hand hygiene before removing each piece of PPE.

Due to viral aerosolization, there are additional risks of contracting the virus if CPR is performed on a COVID-19 individual. In general, further precautions are required such as covering the patient with a sheet and donning full PPE (gown, goggles, face mask, gloves) before initiating CPR. Consult ISDH and CDC guidelines for detailed information.

Healthcare worker (HCW) scrubs and shoes should be removed at the end of a shift before leaving the building. The HCW should change into street clothes, and scrubs should be placed in a plastic bag and laundered when arriving home.

Self-Care for facility staff

The presence of COVID-19 in our buildings and/or community can cause emotional distress and physical exhaustion. We had to change how we take care of residents and several of these changes create additional work for all. Residents with COVID-19 may be very sick and some will die. A certain level of anxiety during the pandemic is to be expected and can cause us to be more aware of health risks and take additional safety precautions. This is good. However, anxiety, fear, frustration, grief, and fatigue can become overwhelming during a pandemic. The ability of HCWs to make good decisions can also suffer. Here are some ideas to self-care:
1) **Set boundaries.** It is essential to have boundaries in which you are able to remove yourself, both physically and emotionally, away from the work environment. It’s admirable to want to help by working extra shifts, but be cautious of overextending yourself. Take your scheduled breaks at work and give your body, mind, and emotions a chance to rest. Check-in with yourself. How are you coping with things? If emotional distress persists, talk to a friend, family member, peer, manager, or therapist.

2) **Stay informed about the COVID-19 outbreak.** Make use of reliable and trusted sources of information. Limit media exposure when it becomes more anxiety-provoking than helpful.

3) **Focus on the day to day decisions and activities you can control.** The scale of the COVID-19 outbreak can be overwhelming, so it is helpful to focus on things that that are within your control. Wearing PPE correctly can keep you safe and is in your control. Communicate constructively with co-workers and problem solve together. Help your co-worker who seems to be struggling, and ask for help when you are the one needing it.

4) **Take time to care for yourself.** Eat healthy and well, get adequate sleep, and engage in enjoyable activities during your time off work. Moderate physical exercise can be revitalizing! Connect with nature. Connect with people you love, and ask for support when you need it (and we all need it sometimes).

5) **Stay home if you are sick.** If you have COVID symptoms it is essential to be tested and self-isolate until you know if results are positive or negative. Consult your regular provider or your local health department for testing and follow-up care guidance.

Caring well for yourself will enable you to better care for your residents and your own families. There are many free self-care resources available on the internet. Maintain hope that things will get better in the future.

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**References**

Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. Sustaining the well-being of healthcare personnel during Coronavirus and other infectious disease outbreaks. N.D. Retrieved from [https://www.CSTOnline.org](https://www.CSTOnline.org)

