

FAQs to keeping your family safe when you are working with COVID-19 patients

We have received many questions about healthcare workers concerned about the health of their family members. Below are the most common questions we have received. Please email covidquestions@mountsinai.org with additional questions and we will post the answers as soon as possible.

1. Is there anything special that I should do when I get home from work?

When you get home, it is important to wash your hands. As you travel from the hospital to your home, you may come into contact “high touch” surfaces that may be contaminated. It is therefore always a good idea to wash your hands whenever you enter your home.

2. Should I remove my work clothes before I walk into my house?

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was the general recommendation from infection prevention that healthcare workers who work in procedural areas like the operating room should change into street clothes before leaving the hospital. The recommendation is still true today. Healthcare workers who are involved in procedures that may lead to contamination of their scrubs with blood and body fluids should change into street clothes before leaving the hospital.

For everyone else who does not work in procedural areas, donning and doffing PPE throughout the day may cause you to sweat more. While your clothes may feel dirty at the end of the day, changing your clothes before leaving the hospital is not recommended. Respiratory viruses, including coronaviruses, are not transmitted through articles of clothing. But it is not unreasonable to change when you get home if that would make you more comfortable.

3. Should I avoid my family members when I am at home?

If you are feeling well, there is no reason to avoid your family members. Frequent hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer is recommended. Everyone should make sure that they cover their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze, but otherwise you may act normally with your family members.

4. Should I avoid interacting with my pets when I am at home?

If you are feeling well, there is no reason to avoid your pets. Similar to contact with humans, you need to make sure that you cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze.

5. What should I do for my family members if I develop symptoms like cough or fever?

If you develop symptoms of any respiratory illness, you should isolate yourself from your family members. (Stay in a separate bedroom; use a separate bathroom if available -- otherwise, disinfect after using; all members of household should wash hands often; and dispose of used tissues in lined trash cans.) Isolation from family members is recommended until 1) at least 7

days have passed since the start of your symptoms, 2) your symptoms have improved, and 3) you have been without fever for at least 3 days.