

# UW Health: Says isolating when living with others is challenging, but important to stop the spread of COVID-19

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MADISON, Wis. – With COVID-19 cases still at record levels, more people than ever need to be in isolation, but for people living with families or roommates it's not always easy in practice.

If you test positive for COVID-19, you should start isolation either on the first day you have symptoms, or if you are asymptomatic, on the day you receive a positive test result, for at least five days. After those five days, you should adhere to five more days of strict masking, according to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It is tricky to isolate from those in your household, so it can be helpful to establish a game plan as a family or with roommates right away to minimize the risk of spread, according to Dan Shirley, interim medical director of infection prevention at UW Health.

“If everyone is on the same page and knows how they can protect themselves and help others in the household, it will make this isolation time more comfortable and easier to navigate,” he said.

In some ways having others around to help can make isolation at home easier, but there are steps to take to ensure that parents, siblings or friends are safe, Shirley said.

“When in isolation, those living with you can bring you food, mail or other necessities, give you someone to talk with – albeit ideally with distance between you and with everyone masked – but it’s just good to know someone is there and you aren’t alone,” he said.

The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to complete a vaccine series or get a booster dose, but infections can happen in the vaccinated, Shirley said.

Here are few recommended steps to keep other people in your household safe when you are isolating due to a COVID-19 infection, according to the CDC:

- Stay in a separate room from other household members, if possible.
- Use a separate bathroom, if possible.
- Take steps to [improve ventilation at home](#), if possible.
- Avoid contact with other members of the household and pets.
- Don’t share personal household items, like cups, towels and utensils.
- If you can’t utilize separate bathrooms or bedrooms, wear a [well-fitting mask](#) when you need to be around other people.
- Observe your symptoms such as a cough, sore throat, runny nose, and if symptoms become severe, seek emergency medical care.

Shirley is available for interviews today.