

Infection control measures for homes of coronavirus disease 2019 heroes

Sir,

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is very contagious and data showed that on average, each infected person transmits the infection to further 2.2 individuals.^[1] On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic.^[2]

There is no evidence-based prophylaxis and cure for this novel disease. As prevention is key to avert the spread of pandemic, globally, measures (social distancing, lockdown, enhanced surveillance, and contact tracing)^[3] to reduce person-to-person transmission have been employed to control the COVID-19 outbreak.

The onus lies on the COVID heroes – the frontline health-care personnel, sanitary staff, defense personnel, airline staff, media persons, essential commodity suppliers, and others involved in the mandatory operational modalities. Infection control measures for family members when taking care of heroes are a farfetched thought as they are categorized to be the general population, but is it so? Should these people not be considered as one of those who may be given due attention – both medical and moral? But, the necessary preventive and precautionary measures for the family members of heroes from themselves are missing in most of the guidelines even in the available published literature on COVID-19.

Preventive measures should emphasize minimal or no crossover between belongings of COVID heroes used at workplace and those at respective homes. Decontamination of phone and laptops may be highlighted. Ensure an appropriate setting and adequate provisions for COVID heroes in their own homes; a separate, well-ventilated, single room with *en suite* facilities (i.e., hand hygiene and toilet facilities) should be provided to them. If staying in a separate room is not feasible, 1 m distance from the COVID heroes may be maintained, e.g., family members should sleep on a separate bed.

Awareness on standard precautions among family members of COVID heroes, particularly hand hygiene either cleaning hands with a household soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (between 60% and 95% ethanol or isopropanol),^[4] need to be emphasized. The importance of covering nose and mouth with a bent

elbow or paper tissue when coughing or sneezing and immediate disposal of paper tissue in a dustbin with a lid and then performing hand hygiene may be emphasized to the families. Materials utilized for covering the mouth/nose may be discarded. If to be reused, wash using regular soap or detergent and water, preferably at 60°C. Family members may wear a mask that covers their mouth and nose if sharing room with COVID19 heroes. There should be no reuse of disposable gloves or masks. Family members may be given instructions about when and where to seek care if they suspect symptoms, transportation to use, and precautions to be followed.

Environmental controls may include dedicated eating utensils, linen and toiletries for the COVID19 heroes. These items may be cleaned with soap and warm water after every use and may be reused. Clean and disinfect areas on routine basis that are commonly handled in the room, such as bedframes, side tables, and other furniture items. Regular soap or detergent should be used for cleaning. After rinsing, disinfectant containing 0.1% sodium hypochlorite, equivalent to 1000 ppm, may be applied. Ethanol (70%) can be used for surfaces that cannot be cleaned with bleach. Disinfect washroom and toilet seats at least once daily with disinfectant containing 0.1% sodium hypochlorite. Clean the COVID hero's clothes (e.g., aprons of health personnel) linen and towels using regular household soap/detergent and warm water or machine wash at 60°C–90°C. The waste generated should be disposed as per the prevailing local method of disposing general solid waste.^[5]

COVID19 heroes are the first contacts of the patients infected with this highly contagious disease. Therefore, it becomes important to avoid inadvertent disease transmission to their family members when living under the same roof. In a nutshell, COVID heroes need to take care of themselves and their family members in a holistic manner. On the family's part, they may be informed of the added risks and associated preventive measures, additional to the moral and emotional support that they might need to provide to COVID heroes.

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There are no conflicts of interest.

Letter to Editor

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