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Managing COVID-19 at home with assistance from your general practice

A guide, action plan and symptom diary for patients

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Managing COVID-19 at home with assistance from your general practice: A guide, action plan and symptom diary for patients

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and seas on which we work and live, and pay our respects to Elders, past, present and future.

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About this guide

This guide is for people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and have mild to moderate symptoms.

If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, you must follow the instructions given to you by your local public health unit, health department, hospital or general practitioner (GP).

If you have no symptoms, or your symptoms are mild to moderate, it is usually safe for you to isolate and manage your symptoms at home. If you are recovering in your home instead of going to hospital, your care team could include your GP, nurse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner and the local public health unit.

Remember: It is normal for COVID-19 symptoms to change over time. Some people will have no symptoms and some people's symptoms might become worse over a couple of weeks. This guide is designed to help you understand what to expect when you are diagnosed with COVID-19, and what to look out for so that you know if your COVID-19 is getting worse.

Most people with COVID-19 will recover without needing to go to hospital or any special treatment.

All COVID-19 patients need to be monitored closely while they recover at home. This is how we can keep them safe with regular check-ups.

While you will have regular contact with your health providers, you will need to continue to monitor your own health as well throughout this time. To help you to monitor your health at home, you will need some equipment, including a thermometer and a pulse oximeter. Exactly what you will need and how you can get hold of this equipment is explained later in the guide.

Do not wait for your health provider to contact you if you have symptoms that are causing you concern.

Your COVID-19 action plan and symptom diary

The My COVID-19 action plan and My daily symptom diary can be found at the end of this guide in the Extra resources section. The action plan should be filled out with the support of your GP and nurse during your first telehealth appointment. You will need to keep this somewhere easy to find. We recommend that you share this with a household member or a friend you trust who can regularly check in with you each day while you are in isolation. If you need to speak with a healthcare professional, or if you call for an ambulance, then show them this action plan.

You will need to fill out the My daily symptom diary at least once every day while you are isolating at home. Your GP or nurse might ask you to continue to fill in the symptoms more frequently or for a longer period of time. The My daily symptom diary will help you to keep a check on how you are feeling. It will also help your GP or nurse check on your symptoms and determine if your management plan needs changing.

Your telehealth check-ups

While you are isolating at home with COVID-19, you will have regular telehealth consultations (check-ups) with your GP or nurse. It is best if you can use video for these check-ups, otherwise phone check-ups will be used. How often you have these check-ups and how long they go for will depend on how severe your symptoms are and how your health was before you were infected with COVID-19. This will also depend on how comfortable you are feeling at home, how much support you have and how well you are recovering from COVID-19. Your GP or nurse will organise these appointments, but you can ask for them to be more often. You can add them to the My COVID-19 action plan in the Extra resources section at the end of this guide. In most cases, you will not need a face-to-face appointment during your isolation, but your GP or nurse will discuss this with you. At these check-ups, ask the GP or nurse any questions you have and let them know of any concerns.

COVID-19 assistance in your language

You can access COVID-19 assistance in your language by calling the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080 and selecting option 5 for interpreter services.

You can access the Centrelink multilingual phone service on 131 202.

What do I need to do when isolating at home?

Anyone diagnosed with COVID-19 must isolate to prevent the spread of infection. Isolating when you are infectious – which means that you have the virus and can pass it on to others – protects your family, friends and the wider community from COVID-19. Isolation is a public health requirement.

Isolation involves:

- **staying at home, unless you need to leave to get medical care or if you feel unsafe in your home**
  - do not attend work or school, do not visit public areas, and do not travel on public transport, in taxis or ride-share services
  - always call ahead before attending a healthcare or family violence service or police. You must advise them that you have COVID-19
  - in many cases you will be able to receive medical care using telehealth (using a phone or video), and medicines can be arranged by your pharmacist or GP to be delivered to your home
- **living in a separate room away from other people in your household**
  - if you can stay in a separate, well-ventilated room away from the other people in your household who are COVID-19 negative, you should do so
  - if you cannot isolate in a separate room, avoid shared spaces in the house as much as possible and wear a mask when moving through shared areas, and wipe down any surfaces you touch
  - if you can, use a separate bathroom that others do not use. If you share a bathroom, wipe down any surface you touch and flush the toilet with a closed lid
- **ensuring others do not enter your home, unless they are providing necessary medical or personal care, or emergency services**
  - the people who usually live in your house with you can continue to stay there if they are unable to live somewhere else during this time
  - if they stay in the home with you, they are considered to be close contacts and are also required to isolate (refer to What information do I give to my caregiver and other people in the household?)
  - if you have a household contact who has a weak immune system, is elderly or has another risk for severe COVID-19, contact your state/territory health department to see if they can help with finding them places to stay
- **having groceries and other essential items delivered to your home**
  - as all household members will be in isolation, it is important to arrange delivery of groceries and other essential items
  - ask a friend or neighbour to bring essential items to your door
  - your council might also provide services to help you during this time

- **accessing services you require**
  - if you have significant care-giving needs that you are unable to manage due to contracting COVID-19, supports are available through your state/territory health department or Centrelink social work services
  - to access a social worker, call the same number you use to call Centrelink or the Centrelink families line on 136 150 and ask for a social worker
  - if you require a translation service, call the Centrelink multilingual phone service on 131 202 and ask for a social worker.

If you need help managing addictions while isolating at home, speak with your doctor or nurse. Supports are available.

You will need official clearance before you leave isolation (refer to What do I do at the end of my isolation?).

What can I do to stop the spread of the virus?

COVID-19 spreads between people who are in close contact, through respiratory droplets and airborne particles that are created and sprayed when an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes. To help protect other people in your household, you should do the following:

- **Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly**
  - practise good hand hygiene by washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
  - use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser if soap and water are not available, and your hands are not visibly dirty.
- **Wear a face mask**
  - you should wear a mask whenever you are in contact with other people in your house. Ideally, this is a P2/N95 mask. You can buy this from the pharmacy over the phone or online and have it delivered
  - the mask should cover your mouth and nose
  - do not touch the mask while you are wearing it
  - when the mask gets wet or dirty, replace it immediately with a clean, dry mask
  - other people in the household or people providing care to you should wear a mask that covers their mouth and nose when they are in the room with you
  - remember that the mask will have the virus on it from your body. You need to make sure you place it directly into a bin so that is does not rest anywhere else and it will not be touched by anyone else.
- **Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces**
  - every day, clean and disinfect any surfaces that you touch frequently, such as doorknobs, light switches, handles, toilets, taps and sinks

  - wipe down surfaces with detergent, followed by a disinfectant (or use a two-in-one product with both cleaning and disinfecting properties).
  - if someone else is cleaning for you, they should wear a mask and gloves while doing so
  - wash hands thoroughly after completing this task, even if gloves were used.[1]
- **Reduce clutter**
  - to make cleaning as easy as possible, consider reducing clutter in the room in which you are staying.
- **Practise good cough and sneeze hygiene**
  - everyone in the household should cough or sneeze into their elbow, or cover their mouth and nose with a tissue
  - wash your hands after discarding the tissue.
- **Continue to breastfeed if you are already, or if you would like to begin**
  - you should wear a mask while doing this and maintain hand hygiene.

Until you are told you will not spread the virus, **you should not**:

- kiss or have sex
  - these have a high risk of passing on the virus
- share personal items
  - you should use separate dishes, cups, cutlery, towels, bedding and other items so that others in the household do not use them
  - after use, wash all these items separately on the hottest possible setting.

What can I do to help manage my COVID-19 at home?

Each day, you should record your symptoms using the My daily symptom diary and discuss these with your GP or nurse during your check-ups. You should watch out for worsening symptoms and follow your My COVID-19 action plan.

Try to get plenty of rest, drink lots of water and eat well. You can still do moderate exercise if you feel well enough (within your home and/or garden).

Your GP can advise you of any other medicines that might be needed to manage your symptoms. Make sure your GP and nurse know exactly what medicines you are taking.

Paracetamol or ibuprofen could be used for symptom relief if you have taken these before and have had no problems. Oral rehydration solution can be used if you have bad nausea, vomiting or diarrhea.[2]

What symptoms might I have with COVID-19?

Common symptoms

Most people with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms. The most commonly reported symptoms include:

- fever
- fatigue
- loss of taste and/or smell
- respiratory symptoms

– coughing

– increased phlegm or sputum.

Other symptoms associated with COVID-19 can include:

- headache
- sore throat
- mild shortness of breath
- muscle or joint pains
- runny nose
- chills
- intermittent nausea/vomiting
- intermittent diarrhoea.[3]

Severe symptoms

If you develop any of the following symptoms (or any other symptoms recorded in the severe symptoms section of your My COVID-19 action plan), call (or ask someone else to call) emergency services on 000 immediately. Tell the phone operator that you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and have severe symptoms, and that you need an ambulance.

The following symptoms could indicate more severe or serious illness, so they should be treated in a hospital:*

- your oxygen level is 92%* or less when you test using the pulse oximeter, even if you feel okay (see how to check this below)

- worsening shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- blue lips or face
- pain or pressure in the chest
- cold and clammy, or pale and mottled, skin
- fainting or collapse
- being more confused
- becoming difficult to wake up
- little or no urine output – less urine than usual, even though you have been drinking lots of fluid
- coughing up blood.[3]

* Your GP might also tell you to look out for other severe symptoms that have been added to your My COVID-19 action plan, and will update the action plan accordingly if the patient is a child or depending on your medical history.

How do I check my oxygen level, heart rate (pulse), respiratory rate (breathing) and temperature?

It is important to know how to use this equipment to monitor your health at home. It is helpful for others in your home to also know how to use this equipment to assist you, especially if you become quite ill.

Oxygen level

You could be asked to check your oxygen levels once or twice a day using a small device called a pulse oximeter. The pulse oximeter clips over your finger. It does not hurt and only takes a minute to check.

You might be given a pulse oximeter by your general practice, hospital or other care provider. You can also purchase one from a pharmacy over the phone or online, and have it delivered to your home. Some **smartphones/smartwatches** have a pulse oximeter function. These are not accurate and **should not be used**.[4]

If you are looking after a child with COVID-19 and are asked to monitor oxygen levels, you might require a pulse oximeter specially designed for children. Your GP or nurse will discuss this with you.

When testing your oxygen:

1. Remove any nail polish or false nails (these can interfere with the device)
2. Wash your hands with warm water and thoroughly dry them (the device works best when your hands are warm)
3. Sit in an upright position
4. Give your fingers a wiggle and rub to get the blood flowing
5. Attach the clip to one of your fingers so that the tip of your finger is touching the end of the device. The palm of your hand should be pointing down, and the screen of the pulse oximeter should be pointing up so you can read it
6. Keep your hand and fingers still
7. Breathe normally and restfully
8. After waiting for one minute, record the number next to the SpO2 symbol

Your oxygen level should be 95% or higher. If it is lower than this, then it could be a sign you need more frequent check-ups with your GP or nurse, or that it is safer for you to be in hospital.

If you are not getting a reading, or if the reading is under 95%, give your fingers a wiggle, take a few breaths and try the device on a different finger.

If it is still low, follow your My COVID-19 action plan that you filled out with your GP (found in the Extra resources section at the end of this guide).

Heart rate (pulse)

Your pulse oximeter can also check your heart rate. Your pulse is your heart rate, and this is the number showing next to the PR (pulse rate) or BPM (beats per minute) symbol.

Some smartphones/smartwatches have a heart rate function, but these are not accurate and should not be used.

If you do not have a pulse oximeter, you can check your heart rate manually by placing your index and middle fingers of one hand on the opposite wrist under the thumb.

With your fingers lightly on your wrist, you can count the number of beats that you feel over a 30-second period of time. You then need to calculate the beats per minute by doubling the number of beats you counted over 30 seconds. This rate is your heart rate.

Respiratory rate (breathing)

Try to relax and breathe normally. Set a timer for 30 seconds, and start to count the number of times you breathe in and out before the time is up. Double this number and this will be your respiratory rate per minute.

Your GP or nurse can also count your respiratory rate by watching your chest rise and fall when doing a video check-up.

If you cannot check your own respiratory rate, think about if you are:

- breathless when you walk
- breathless when you are sitting
- breathless when you are speaking.

Write in the My daily symptom diary next to 'breathlessness', if you feel it is getting better, worse or remains the same.

Temperature

If you do not have a thermometer at home, you can buy one from a pharmacy over the phone or online, and have it delivered to your home. Each thermometer is different, so follow the directions from the manufacturer, or ask the GP or nurse.

Record your oxygen level, pulse, respiratory rate and temperature in your My daily symptom diary at least once a day. Your GP or nurse might also ask you to use an app to record your symptoms, which they can access from their practice. If they do ask you to do this, they will discuss this with you.

Your GP or nurse will discuss these measurements with you during your video/phone check-ups, but do not wait for their call if you have any have any concerns. Follow your My COVID-19 action plan.

What can I do to take care of my mental health and wellbeing?

Being in isolation can be stressful. If you have pre-existing mental health issues or past experiences of trauma or detention, it might be particularly difficult. It is important to let your GP or nurse know about any mental health issues that you have had in the past and any new concerns.

Speak to your GP or nurse if your mental health worsens or if you have any concerns. They are there to support your physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Here are some ways you can look after your mental health during this time:

- **Keep in touch with friends, family and community.** Maintain contact with loved ones via telephone, email and social media, or by using video technologies, such as WhatsApp and Zoom.
- **Contact local community and religious organisations.** These organisations can provide support services, especially if you are socially isolated.
- **Develop or maintain a daily routine.** This could include showering and getting dressed each day, having regular mealtimes and exercising (within your home or garden). It is important not to lie in bed all day.
- **Learn more about COVID-19 from trustworthy and credible sources.** Understanding more about the virus might help you feel less anxious.
- **Use the time to do new things.** Time in isolation can provide an opportunity to try activities, such as craft, drawing or reading. Try to avoid being in front of a computer or phone screen all day.
- **Spend time outdoors.** If you have a private courtyard, balcony or garden, spend some time there each day to get some fresh air.

You can also access mental health services, including:

- Head to Health – provides links to trusted Australian mental health online and phone supports, resources and treatment options. This useful website also has online programs and forums, as well as a range of digital information resources
- Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service – provides information, advice and strategies to help people manage their wellbeing and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic
- healthdirect – provides information on maintaining your wellbeing when isolating, and links to mental health supports
- Kids Helpline – provides resources on mental health for children during isolation
- resources in many languages, which have been developed by the Transcultural Mental Health Centre
- in-language support through the National Coronavirus Helpline by calling 1800 020 080 and choosing option 5 for translation services
- 1800RESPECT by phone or web chat, when it is safe to do so, if you are experiencing domestic violence. 1800RESPECT is available 24 hours/seven days a week, and can provide you with confidential support, counselling and information.

What do I tell my work, and what financial supports are available if I cannot work?

- You do not have to tell your employer that you have COVID-19, unless you were at work when you might have been infectious (to help with contact tracing). Remember that you cannot leave your house to go to work during your isolation period.
- If you are well enough, you can continue to work from home if your job allows during your isolation period.
- If your work cannot be done from home, or you are not well enough to work from home, and cannot earn an income, you might be able to get the Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment.

What do I do at the end of my isolation?

You will need official clearance before you leave isolation. Depending on where you are this may be provided by your GP, the local public health unit, health department or another organisation contracted to do this. Your GP will tell you who will provide this. This is to make sure that you are not infectious when you return to the community. You do not need another swab to be released.

Once you have been given clearance to leave isolation, you will need to continue to follow the COVID-safe rules and restrictions that apply in your area.

Some people feel anxious after they are allowed to leave their home again after being isolated with COVID-19. Some people find it hard to be around other people again. You can be confident that you are no longer infectious after your period of isolation has been completed and the local public health unit has confirmed you are safe to leave your home. You might find that you need to reassure your family and friends about this. It is natural for people to find these conversations difficult sometimes.

You might have heard of 'long COVID'. Long COVID is when your COVID-19 symptoms continue for some months after you were first infected with COVID-19. These symptoms include feeling tired, having a persistent cough, having trouble thinking clearly, depression or anxiety. Most people who have COVID-19 recover completely within a few weeks, but 5–15% of people who have had COVID-19 will still have some symptoms after three months.[5,6]

You should have a check-up with your GP in six weeks to discuss any ongoing symptoms and whether you need any additional support. You can make an appointment earlier if you need.

When do I get vaccinated (or have my booster) after having COVID-19?

People who have had COVID-19 still need to be vaccinated to be protected.

If you are not already vaccinated, or are only partially vaccinated (received one dose), you should receive the COVID-19 vaccine after you have fully recovered. You should receive it within six months from your illness.[7] You do not have to delay getting your booster dose once you have recovered.

What information do I give my caregiver and other people in the household?

Current evidence suggests that a person with COVID-19 can infect other people up to three days before experiencing any symptoms.[3] This means that the infected person can infect others before they know that they are infectious. A person with COVID-19 is also considered infectious until they are told that they are well enough to be released from isolation.

Anyone who has been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 should monitor their own health and get tested if they develop any of the symptoms described at the beginning of this guide.

Caregivers and other household members who have had close contact with a person with COVID-19 will need to quarantine for a period of time. This time differs between states/territories and might be dependent on if they live with the COVID-19-positive person. They will also need to be tested for COVID-19. People should should check the specific requirement in their area.

When quarantining, people need to stay at home, unless they need to leave to get medical care or if they feel unsafe in their home.

- People in quarantine must not:
  - attend work or school, visit public areas, or travel on public transport or in taxis or ride-share services
- People in quarantine should:
  - always call ahead before attending a healthcare service, family violence service or police, and let them know that they have been a close contact of someone with COVID-19 and are quarantining

- access medical care using telehealth (using a phone or video) if they need it. Medicines can be arranged to be delivered to their home.

At the end of the required quarantine period, if the close contact has not developed any symptoms and has completed any testing requirements, the quarantine period ends. This means that the close contact is allowed to return to the community. They still need to follow the restrictions currently in place in the local area.

Household contacts who are not providing care might choose to move to another location, if this is available, to complete their quarantine. By doing this, they could be released from quarantine at an earlier date than if they choose to stay at home.

Caregivers and others in the household should also read the above information about how they can help to stop the spread of the virus.

I am a parent, guardian or carer of a child with COVID-19 – What do I need to know?

Having your child diagnosed with COVID-19 can be stressful for you and your family.

It is important to remember that, so far in Australia, there have not been many hospital admissions for children due to COVID-19 severity. Severe disease is rare.

Children can have similar symptoms to adults. Many children with COVID-19 will have no symptoms, or only mild symptoms similar to a cold.[8]

Your GP will adapt the My COVID-19 action plan based on your child's age, symptoms and past medical history. This action plan can be found in the Extra resources section at the end of this guide.

If you are worried about your child at any stage, contact your general practice for review as soon as possible. If they are showing severe symptoms, call 000 as per your child's My COVID-19 action plan.

Further information

- Isolation for coronavirus (COVID-19) – provides advice about isolation, steps to take while in isolation and advice on living in the same house as someone in isolation.
- Quarantine for coronavirus (COVID-19) provides advice for patients who are well, but have been in contact with someone with COVID-19.
- Managing COVID-19 at home – provides answers to frequently asked questions.
- healthdirect coronavirus (COVID-19) Symptom Checker – asks you a number of questions about your symptoms and gives general advice on appropriate actions.
- Centrelink social work services – provides access to social workers over the phone.
- Local state and territory health departments – provide contact details for support services in your local area.

Extra resources

My COVID-19 action plan

Keep this action plan somewhere easy to find.

Fill out the symptom checklist at least every day while you are isolating, or for as long or as frequently as advised by your GP or nurse. It will help you track how you are feeling. It will also help your GP or nurse track your symptoms and determine whether your management plan needs changing.

It is a good idea to share it with a household member or a friend you trust who can check in with you each day while you are in isolation.

If you need to speak with any healthcare professional or call for an ambulance, show them this plan.

My details

Name:

Age: Date of birth:

I am isolating:

☐ at home alone ☐ with household members ☐ with a visiting carer

Relevant medical history (physical and mental):

My usual medicines are:

I have been prescribed these medicines by my GP (or other health professional) to manage my COVID-19 symptoms:

COVID-19 vaccination status: ☐ Fully vaccinated ☐ Partially vaccinated ☐ Unvaccinated

Date of first dose _____ second dose _____ third or booster dose_____

Allergies and adverse reactions:

Date of onset of symptoms:

Date of test confirming COVID-19 positive status:

Advanced care plan: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Emergency contact:

Relationship:

Contact details:

My care team

My general practice is:

Their phone number is:

My GP's name is:

My nurse's name is:

If I need my GP/nurse and they are unavailable, I will call:

My scheduled telehealth check-ups

Date:	Time:	Practitioner:	Completed:
Date:	Time:	Practitioner:	Completed:
Date:	Time:	Practitioner:	Completed:
Date:	Time:	Practitioner:	Completed:
Date:	Time:	Practitioner:	Completed:
Date:	Time:	Practitioner:	Completed:
Date:	Time:	Practitioner:	Completed:
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Date:	Time:	Practitioner:	Completed:
Date:	Time:	Practitioner:	Completed:

Managing my symptoms*

If I have mild symptoms, such as:

- aches and pains
- sore throat
- dry cough
- runny nose

I will manage these symptoms by:

- getting enough rest
- staying active (staying within my house and/or garden)
- eating well
- maintaining a good fluid intake
- taking any medicines discussed with my GP (or other health provider)
- taking paracetamol or ibuprofen for symptom relief.

I will continue to monitor and document my symptoms in the My daily symptom diary.

*Your GP might change these parameters if the patient is a child, or depending on your medical history.

Managing my symptoms* (continued)

If I have any moderate symptoms, such as:

- oxygen level of 93–94%*
- respiratory rate of 20–30 breaths per minute*
- temperature above 38 degrees*
- vomiting or diarrhoea
- mild breathlessness or a persistent cough
- struggling to get out of bed, and feeling unusually tired and weak
- My daily symptom diary looking like it is tracking worse, rather than stable or better

I will contact my general practice for review as soon as possible. If they are unavailable, I will call the person/service listed in the 'My care team' section, or the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080.

*Your GP might change these parameters if the patient is a child, or depending on your medical history

If I have any **severe symptoms**, such as:

- oxygen level of 92% or less*
- respiratory rate of more than 30 breaths per minute*
- heart rate staying at or above 120 beats per minute*
- severe shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- lips or face turning blue
- pain or pressure in my chest
- cold and clammy, or pale and mottled, skin
- confusion (eg I cannot recall the day, time or names)
- fainting
- finding it difficult to keep my eyes open
- little or no urine output
- coughing up blood

I will call 000 immediately and let them know that I have COVID-19.

*Your GP might change these parameters if the patient is a child, or depending on your medical history.

My daily symptom diary

Each day (or as often as your GP or nurse says), fill out the table below.

For oxygen levels, heart rate, respiratory rate (breathing) and temperature, record the daily reading. For other symptoms, think about how the symptom is today, compared with the day before – and place the best letter to describe this:

same (S), better (B) or worse (W).

Signs and symptoms	**EXAMPLE** Day 1 10 December 2021 9.00 am	**Day 1**	**Day**	**Day**	**Day**	**Day**	**Day**
Oxygen level	95%						
Heart rate (pulse)	90						
Respiratory (breathing)	16						
Temperature	37.1						
Breathlessness	S						
Cough	W						
Muscle aches and pains	B						
Headache	B						
Fatigue	W						
Vomiting or diarrhoea	B						
Intake							
Food intake	B						
Fluid intake	B						

Signs and symptoms	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day
Oxygen level											
Heart rate (pulse)											
Respiratory (breathing)											
Temperature											
Breathlessness											
Cough											
Muscle aches and pains											
Headache											
Fatigue											
Vomiting or diarrhoea											
Intake											
Food intake											
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Signs and symptoms	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day	Day
Oxygen level											
Heart rate (pulse)											
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Cough											
Muscle aches and pains											
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Vomiting or diarrhoea											
Intake											
Food intake											
Fluid intake											

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