

# COVID-19: How Do We Stay Safe?

COVID-19 is a disease resulting from infection with a coronavirus named SARS-CoV-2. This disease can cause many symptoms but most notably respiratory symptoms which can become severe and result in low oxygen levels, causing one to feel short of breath. The virus has caused many millions of cases of COVID-19 and over 2 million deaths worldwide. This fact sheet offers practical guidance on how to avoid catching the virus as well as how to prevent spread in your community.

This infection is considered a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). As of February 17, 2021, there are 109,068,745 confirmed cases and 2,409,011 deaths worldwide. The virus continues to spread across the globe, and many countries, including the US, are experiencing surges of new cases. For up to date information on this outbreak, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>.

## Symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Fever or chills
- Loss of taste or smell
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Many people get COVID infection and have no symptoms. However, a person without symptoms can still spread the virus to other people as a carrier. This puts other people around them at risk who might have more serious illness.

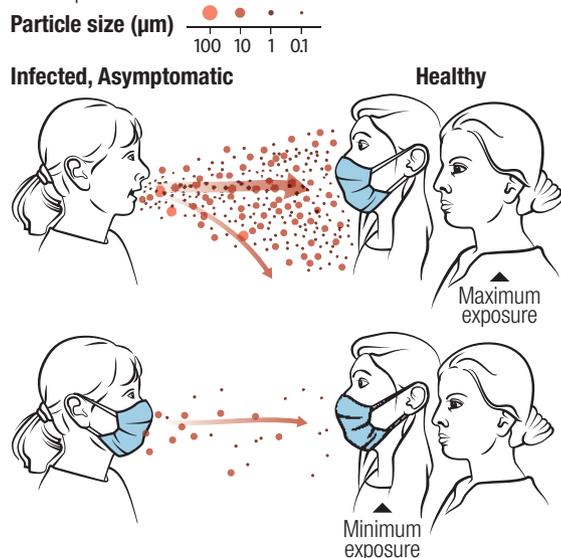
## Prevention and control of COVID-19 infection:

### General principles

- Illness can range from asymptomatic, to mild, to severe.
- Elderly people and others with pre-existing medical illnesses like diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, obesity, cancer, immunosuppression and smokers are at the highest risk of dying from infection. However, anyone including pregnant women and even children can get the virus and become ill from it.
- Even as vaccines become more available, it is very important to take actions to prevent the spread of this virus. This includes wearing a mask and social distancing when outside the home. People who have been fully vaccinated should continue these actions until most people in the community have also been vaccinated.
- Everyone needs to do their best to avoid getting sick as well as spreading the virus to other people.
- You do not have to be sick or have symptoms to transmit the virus. This is why you have to take actions to protect others even when you feel well.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick unless you are a healthcare provider. If someone in your household is sick, help limit exposure as much as possible to others in the home.

## Masks reduce airborne transmission

Infectious aerosol particles can be released during breathing and speaking by asymptomatic infected individuals. No masking maximizes exposure, whereas universal masking results in the least exposure.



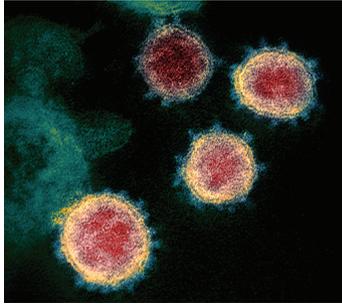
## What you can do

It is very important for people to follow basic infection control measures to help prevent COVID-19 and/or other viruses, like influenza. Do not let your guard down because of “pandemic fatigue” or stress. When people get lax (or sloppy) with taking these precautions, infection rates go up. Find ways to relieve stress and support each other safely.

### Top actions to keep you and others safe

- Keep social distancing. Stay at least 6 feet away ‘like a regular bicycle’ from other people.
- Wear a mask whenever you are out of your home and around others. Masks block you spreading the virus and can reduce how much virus you might inhale. Wear a mask that covers both nose and mouth, and is snugly fitted on the chin. The best face coverings for you to use are medical masks or cloth masks with several layers. Bandanas and gaiters are not as effective. For more information about how and when to use masks, go to the ATS website at: <https://www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/face-coverings-pandemic.pdf>.
- Wash your hands often and for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. (Sing “Happy Birthday” twice). If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid being in large gatherings. Gatherings are strongly discouraged. Stay at home except for work (if you cannot work remotely) or essential, infrequent trips to purchase food and medicines, or to attend healthcare visits. You can exercise outdoors with social distancing. Restaurants, indoor gyms and coffee shops have been linked to increased spread of the virus, so you have to really consider your risk spending time in these or other public places.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Quarantine if you have close contact with a person who is COVID-19 positive. It may take up to 14 days to develop symptoms once exposed to this virus. If you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, you should stay home for at least 14 days.



SARS-CoV-2 is the virus that causes COVID-19 (NIAID)

### Other ways to reduce your risk and avoid infection exposure to COVID-19 and other viruses

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched items and surfaces with a regular household cleaning spray followed by an EPA-approved disinfectant such as diluted bleach (0.1%) or alcohol solution (62-71%) or hydrogen peroxide (0.5%). COVID-19 can survive on surfaces for as long as 5 days. For full list of disinfectants, see <https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf>.
- Do not travel unless you really have to. Avoid public transportation if possible. This is especially important for older persons and others at risk for severe illness. The CDC maintains a regularly updated travel advisory site. If you travel to an area with high COVID infection, you may need to quarantine on your return home. Harvard's Global Health Institute and Edmond J Safera Center for Ethics has a COVID-19 Risk Level map that allows you to check the COVID-19 risk rating in your state or county. The map visually displays dots that are Green (on track for containment), Yellow (community spread), Orange (accelerated spread) or Red (tipping point). <https://globalepidemics.org/key-metrics-for-covid-suppression/>.
- Be sure to get your yearly flu vaccine and check with your healthcare provider to see if you need a pneumococcal vaccine.
- Keep a healthy lifestyle including healthy diet and sleep, physical activity/exercise. These behaviors are known to improve overall immunity against infections.
- No smoking or vaping.

### What to do if you have symptoms

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash.
- Stay home when you are sick. If you are sick with COVID-19, you will need to stay home until:
  - ◆ you have no fever for 72 hours (without using fever reducing medicine).
  - ◆ at least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
  - ◆ your other symptoms have improved. For additional information, see the CDC website at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>.

### Treatment

- There is one type of therapy (monoclonal antibodies) now being used in some patients with COVID-19. Two medicines have emergency use authorization and one has recently been approved. If you have been recently diagnosed with COVID-19 and are not in the hospital, ask your healthcare provider about whether you might benefit from this type of treatment. There are also several drugs and treatments being used in hospitalized patients with severe illness. Consider taking part in research studies to help learn more if you are asked to do so.

- Antibiotics do not treat COVID 19 or other viruses. They would only be needed if you have a bacterial infection.
- People with COVID-19 are treated based upon their symptoms and the severity of illness. Most people will have a mild illness and get better.
- Many people can recover at home, but those with more severe illness may need to receive care in the hospital. Some people are so sick that they will need care in the intensive care unit (ICU).

### Seek medical help

- If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and/or you have symptoms (fever or cough or shortness of breath or any other symptoms described here), please call your doctor or healthcare professional first! They will assess you and determine if you need to be seen and tested. If so, you will be given instructions on what to do next. This will allow the office, clinic or acute care facility to get ready for your arrival and help you avoid spreading the virus to others.

### COVID-19 Vaccines

- Vaccines are now available in the US, but the supply is still limited, so they are not yet available for everyone. If you qualify, strongly consider getting a vaccine to help protect you and those you live with. If you are unsure if you qualify or are able to take vaccine, check your state health department website, the CDC, or talk to your healthcare provider.

### Managing information during the pandemic

- If you receive a request from your local public health department or physician's office about contact tracing, please help them to the best of your ability.
- Stay informed and rely ONLY on evidence-based sources such as the CDC, WHO, or local public health departments.
- Do not panic or get overwhelmed. There is hope.

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## Resources

### American Thoracic Society

- [www.thoracic.org/patients](http://www.thoracic.org/patients)
  - COVID-19 Infection vs Influenza
  - Face Coverings During a Pandemic
  - Pneumococcal Vaccination

### Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>
- CDC General Hotline: 1-800-232-4636

### World Health Organization (WHO)

- <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

### Johns Hopkins University COVID-19 Dashboard

- <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

### Harvard Global Health Institute-COVID-19 Suppression Framework

- <https://globalepidemics.org/key-metrics-for-covid-suppression/>

### Healthdata.org

- <https://covid19.healthdata.org/united-states-of-america>
- Kimberly A. Prather, Chia C. Wang, Robert T. Schooley. Reducing transmission of SARS-CoV-2. *Science* 26 Jun 2020 : 1422-1424

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 Reducing transmission of SARS-CoV-2  
 Science 26 Jun 2020:Vol. 368, Issue 6498, pp. 1422-1424

