Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions

This guidance document will continue to be updated as the COVID-19 situation evolves. Visit www.coronavirusnetwork.org for the latest information, updates and resources.

What is the coronavirus and COVID-19?
There are many different kinds of coronaviruses. Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that live in humans and animals. A number of human coronaviruses are known to primarily cause respiratory illness that affects the lungs, though they can impact other systems and organs as well. The previously undiscovered, or novel (new) coronavirus that is responsible for the latest outbreak causes the illness known as COVID-19. ‘CO’ stands for ‘corona,’ ‘VI’ stands for ‘virus,’ and ‘D’ stands for ‘disease.’ ‘19’ refers to the year ‘2019,’ which is the year the illness was discovered. COVID-19 leads to illness that is similar to the cold or flu in mild cases. The majority of cases are mild cases and go away within two weeks. In severe cases, COVID-19 leads to pneumonia-like symptoms and can cause death. Death is primarily caused by congestion in the lungs and organ failure due to lack of oxygen by the lungs.

What does it mean that COVID-19 is a pandemic?
A pandemic is an outbreak of an infectious disease that spreads across multiple continents. Currently, COVID-19 has spread to six out the seven continents and almost all countries across the world.

What are COVID-19 symptoms?
The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- Fever
- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Dry cough
- Headache
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Muscle aches and pains
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Sore throat
- New and sudden loss of taste and/or smell
- Diarrhea, nausea and vomiting

People with COVID-19 can have any number and combination of these symptoms. They can have one of them or all of them over the course of the disease. It is also important to know that people with COVID-19 can show no symptoms at all. Symptoms can arise anywhere from 2-14 days after being infected with the coronavirus, although half of people with coronavirus show symptoms by day 5.
The majority of COVID-19 cases are mild and do not require seeing a doctor or going to the hospital. However, people should call their doctor or seek immediate emergency medical care if they experience any of the following symptoms:

- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Waking up at night with shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New or sudden confusion
- Bluish lips and face

Is COVID-19 like the flu?
While some of the symptoms of the flu and COVID-19 are the same, they are caused by different viruses and it is generally not helpful to compare the two. While there is a vaccine that can reduce the likelihood of getting the flu, there is currently no vaccine that can prevent people from getting sick from the coronavirus. Also, unlike the virus that causes the flu, there is a lot we still do not know about the coronavirus responsible for COVID-19.

How contagious is coronavirus and how can I get it?
The coronavirus is very contagious. It can spread easily from one person to another. It is passed from person-to-person by “droplets” that come from an infected person’s mouth or nose when they cough, sneeze, or even talk. When an infected person sneezes or coughs, droplets that contain the coronavirus can travel up to six feet.

The main way someone gets COVID-19 is by having direct contact with droplets from an infected person. Usually the droplets are inhaled or ingested through the nose or mouth. It is also thought that the coronavirus can enter the body through the eyes. It is important to know that infected people do not have to be sick in order to spread the virus. Most people infected with the coronavirus can spread it up to two days before they begin to feel sick or show any symptoms of illness. Also, infected people who never develop symptoms at all can spread the virus through droplets.

A less common way to get COVID-19 occurs when people touch a surface contaminated by the coronavirus and then touch their mouth, nose, or eyes. Although we are still learning about how long the coronavirus can live on different surfaces, it is generally believed that the coronavirus DOES NOT primarily spread through contact with surfaces or objects, like doorknobs, cardboard packages, food, etc. Instead, the coronavirus primarily spreads through directly inhaling or ingesting droplets in the air that come from an infected person.

Help! I feel sick and I think I have coronavirus! What should I do?
If you are feeling sick and have any COVID-19 symptoms you should seek out a test to confirm whether or not you have the coronavirus. Though testing availability differs from place to place, most states are making sure that anyone who wants a test can get one. To find out where you
can be tested, call your doctor or check the website of your local or state department of health. To learn more about testing, please see the COVID-19 Testing FAQ resource.

Other than going out to get tested, if you are feeling sick you should assume you have the coronavirus and isolate yourself from others and avoid all contact. If contact cannot be avoided, you should wear a face mask that covers your mouth and nose when around others. All of these measures are essential to preventing the spread of the coronavirus and protecting your loved ones and community. If your test results come back positive and you have COVID-19, you should continue to isolate yourself. To learn how to effectively isolate yourself and for how long, please look over the “I Tested Positive for COVID-19, What Now?” resource.

Most cases of COVID-19 lead to mild illness that lasts 10 to 14 days. Mild cases can be taken care of from home without seeking medical care or seeing a doctor. If you are sick, you should make sure you get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids. While isolating yourself, you should also closely keep track of your symptoms to see if they get worse over time. If you develop any severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, persistent chest pain, or new confusion, or are otherwise worried about your health, you should call your doctor or seek emergency medical care.

Help! I have come into contact with someone who has COVID-19. What should I do?
If you have come into contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 and you feel healthy, you should quarantine yourself. This means you must avoid all possible contact with others by separating yourself physically from them. This way, in case you were infected with the coronavirus, you will be unable to pass it on to others. Generally, you should be in quarantine for at least 14 days beginning the day of your last known contact with someone who has COVID-19. While in quarantine, you should keep a close eye on how you are feeling. If you begin to feel sick, you should assume you have the coronavirus and isolate yourself. To learn more about how you can isolate yourself when you are sick, and how this differs from quarantine, please see the “I Think I Have Come into Contact with Someone with COVID-19, What Now?” resource.

Who is most likely to get severely sick from COVID-19?
People over the age of 65 and people with other chronic health problems are most likely to get the sickest from COVID-19 and are the most at risk of dying. Other people at increased risk for getting severely sick from COVID-19 are people with untreated or undertreated HIV and other people whose immune systems might be weakened, such as cancer patients. The chronic health conditions that are believed to put people at increased risk of severe illness include:

- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Chronic lung disease
- Chronic kidney disease
• Serious heart conditions

Though they are not at the most risk, young and/or healthy people are not immune from severe illness, or even death. Unfortunately, although rare, there are numerous cases of young and healthy people dying from COVID-19. We must all act like we are at risk COVID-19. But, more importantly, we must act in ways that protect those that are the most at risk. This means following social distancing guidelines, wearing a mask in public, and isolating/quarantining yourself at home if you are feeling sick or have come into contact with someone with COVID-19.

How deadly is the coronavirus?
There is no doubt that COVID-19 is a deadly illness. As of writing this, the coronavirus has killed over 140,000 people in the United States in only four months. That being said, we do not know what percentage of people sick with COVID-19 will die. Right now, the best guess is about 1% to 3% of people who get sick with COVID-19 will die. Because COVID-19 is more deadly for older people, this percentage increases by age group. For instance, it is expected that 2% to 5% of 65 to 75 year olds infected with the coronavirus will die while 4% to 10% of 75 to 85 year olds infected with the virus will die. It is possible that current estimates overestimate the percent of people who develop deadly cases of COVID-19 because many people who survive with mild to no symptoms are never tested and people with severe cases are more likely to be tested. As testing becomes more widespread, we will likely have a better estimate about how deadly the coronavirus is.

How can I prevent getting and spreading coronavirus?
There are many things people can do to both prevent getting the coronavirus and spreading it to others. To protect yourselves, your loved ones, and your community, you should:

• Wash your hands with soap frequently (especially after being in public) for at least 20 seconds
• Avoid touching your mouth, nose, and eyes (especially with unwashed hands)
• Stay at least 6 feet away from other people
• Where a cloth face mask that covers your nose and mouth (especially when in public and when maintaining 6 feet distance from others is not possible).
• Disinfect “high-touch” surfaces, such as doorknobs, keys, light switches, phones, etc., with alcohol-based disinfectant that is at least 60% alcohol
• Stay at home if you start to feel sick and isolate yourself from others

Why do I need to wear a face mask when I feel healthy?
You should wear a face mask or some other sort of face covering, like a bandanna, that covers your nose or mouth, especially when you are out in public and when you cannot stay 6 feet apart from others. Though wearing a facemask might protect you from getting coronavirus to some extent, the main reason for wearing one is to prevent you from spreading the coronavirus to others in case you are infected with the virus. If you are infected and you sneeze or cough, the mask catches droplets containing coronavirus, preventing them from being ingested or
inhaled by others around you. It is important to wear a face mask even if you feel healthy because it is possible to spread the coronavirus without feeling sick. Most people who have the coronavirus are contagious for two days before they begin to feel sick. In addition, some people with coronavirus never end up feeling sick or showing any symptoms. In other words, you do not need to feel sick in order to spread the coronavirus. That is why it is important to wear a face mask in public, even if you feel healthy.

**What kind of face mask do I need?**

It is recommended that you wear a cloth mask that covers your nose and mouth. Cloth masks can be bought or made at home from an old t-shirt or other materials. Please use this [resource](#) to learn how to make a mask from everyday supplies. Medical masks, such as N95 respirator masks, should not be bought or worn by the general public. These masks are in short supply and are needed by doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers treating COVID-19 patients. Wearing an N95 respirator mask or other medical mask is unlikely to bring added protection to members of the general public because wearing them properly requires training and following strict rules that most tend not to follow.

**What should I do if I think a family member has coronavirus?**

If a loved one gets sick, you should make sure that they isolate themselves and avoid all contact with others. If they live on their own, make sure they are supported with everything they might need while they are isolating. Drop off groceries, prescriptions, and other necessities without having direct contact with them. You should also check in on them often to monitor their health. If your loved one lives with you or others, try to isolate them as best as possible at home. If possible, make sure they use their own bathroom and bedroom separate from others in the family. If space must be shared, make sure your loved one always wears a face mask around others, especially people who are older and are at the greatest risk of severe illness. Also, ventilating a shared space by opening a window or turning on a fan might help reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus. In addition, commonly touched surfaces should be disinfected daily and everyone in the house should wash their hands frequently. Coronavirus is most likely to spread among people that live together and use the same space, so it is crucial that you take these precautions to protect yourself while caring for a loved one who is sick.

**What can I do if I'm worried and anxious about coronavirus?**

It is good to be thinking about how you can take care of yourself, your family and your community in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 is an extremely contagious disease that can lead to life-threatening sickness, especially for the elderly and those with chronic health conditions. This being the case, we must all do our part to stop the spread of the coronavirus by taking the proper precautions, such as wearing a facemask in public. Though it may seem like a lot is out of our control, there is a lot we can do to protect ourselves and others by changing our behaviors. As we adapt to the reality of the coronavirus being with us for the foreseeable future and try to get back to our normal lives, we must all exercise caution and be smart about the risks we choose to take.

Information for this FAQ came from:
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Please note that the guidance in this document does not substitute for the recommendations of your healthcare provider.