I Think I Have Come into Contact with Someone with COVID-19, What Now?

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 sort of ‘contact’ spreads COVID-19? How do I know when I have been truly exposed?

In order to get COVID-19 you must have been in contact, or interacted with, someone who has an active infection of the coronavirus. Most people with coronavirus have an active infection beginning at least two days before they start to feel sick or show symptoms and while they feel sick. Also, some people with an active infection of the coronavirus never end up feeling sick at all. This means that it is possible to catch the coronavirus from someone who appears to be completely healthy and who does not feel sick.

The coronavirus is spread primarily through ‘droplets’ that come from an infected person’s nose or mouth when they sneeze, cough or even talk (especially singing or yelling). These droplets can be inhaled or ingested directly from the air through your nose or mouth. It is also believed that the droplets can get in your eyes and that the coronavirus can infect you that way. The coronavirus can also be spread when you first touch a surface or object that has droplets on it and you then touch your nose, mouth or eyes. This means that the infected person does not need to be near you for you to get the coronavirus.

There are many situations in which you may be exposed to the coronavirus. In particular, you should consider yourself exposed if you have had any of the following interactions with someone who has tested positive with COVID-19:

- Direct physical contact (touching, kissing, shaking hands, etc.)
- You were less than 6 feet away from the COVID-19-positive person for more than 10 minutes (though you can get the coronavirus in an instant)
- You were farther than 6 feet away from COVID-19-positive person, but you shared a space with them for an hour or longer

If you share a home with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, you should consider yourself exposed to the coronavirus. Sharing an inclosed and crowded space with someone who has an active infection of the coronavirus is a situation where the coronavirus can easily spread. That is why it is good to avoid dense groups of people, whether in homes, bars/restaurants, public transportation, or elsewhere.
What should I do if I have come into contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19?

You should quarantine yourself at home. To quarantine, you must avoid close contact with others. You should not leave your home for any reason other than to seek medical care if at all possible. This means you should not leave your home to go on errands of any kind or go to work.

By quarantining you will reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus to others. Having people who were exposed to the coronavirus quarantine themselves is essential to stopping current and future outbreaks. While in quarantine, you should pay close attention to your health and keep an eye out for any worsening of symptoms. You should take your temperature at least twice a day.

You will need support from others to help you stay in quarantine safely. If you need groceries, medication and other supplies, call a friend or family member to drop off what you need. There are also many delivery services you can use. If you are concerned about losing your job or income because you must stay home to isolate, talk to your employer about working from home, if possible, or using sick days you have accrued. In addition, getting a doctor’s note can help.

How long do I have to be in quarantine until I know I don’t have the virus and can’t spread it anymore?

You must be in quarantine for at least 14 days since your last known contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. It is 14 days because it can take anywhere from 2 to 14 days after being exposed for you to show symptoms of COVID-19, though half of people who have the coronavirus start to show symptoms after the 5th day. If you have no symptoms after the 14th day, then you can leave quarantine. If at any point while in quarantine you come into contact with someone else who has COVID-19, you need to restart your 14 day quarantine period beginning on the day you had contact.

I live with other people, so how can I quarantine myself?

If you live with other people, you can protect those you live with by doing the following:

- If possible, confine yourself to a bedroom and a bathroom that are all your own and that you do not share with others
- When in a shared space or room used by other people or pets (whether or not they are currently there) wear a face mask that covers your nose and mouth
- When in the same space or room as other people or pets, make sure that you are at least 6 feet away from them. In confined spaces, such as hallways, this means that only one person should pass through at a time.
● People who are vulnerable to having severe cases of COVID-19 should especially not come in close proximity to you or the rooms that you use. Vulnerable people include those who are 65 years or older, those who are pregnant and those with chronic health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease.
● Cover all of your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Make sure you throw away the tissue immediately and wash your hands with soap and water.
● Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, especially before entering spaces that you share with others, such as the kitchen.
● Do not share personal items with others, such as drinking glasses, sheets, towels, eating utensils, home computers, or bedding. After using such items, make sure they are all thoroughly washed with soap and water.
● Ask the people you live with to frequently disinfect ‘high-touch’ surfaces, such as door knobs, light switches, table tops, and counters.

I share a bedroom and bathroom, so how can I quarantine myself in this situation?

If you are unable to have your own bedroom and bathroom while in quarantine, you can protect the people you live with by doing everything mentioned in the previous answer in addition to the following:

● Do not share personal items, such as cups, eating utensils, towels, and toothpaste. This includes bedding. Beds should not be shared.
● When in the same space or room as other people or pets, make sure that you are at least 6 feet away from them. In confined spaces, such as hallways, bedrooms, or bathrooms, this means that only one person should pass through, or occupy the space, at a time to the extent possible.
● As best as possible, try to ventilate shared spaces, such as bedrooms and bathrooms, by opening a window or turning on a fan. Airflow may help reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus in the case that you become contagious.
● Bathroom sinks are particularly believed to be sources of infection. They should be cleaned frequently and people should not place their toothbrushes on the counter around the sink.

At what point should I get tested for COVID-19?

If you do not have symptoms and are in quarantine, there is no immediate need to seek out a test for COVID-19. If you can not maintain strict quarantine or live with people who are high risk, it is a good idea to be tested. If you get a test while in quarantine and it comes back negative, this does not mean that you can leave quarantine. Since you can get sick from the coronavirus anywhere from 2 to 14 days after being exposed, it is possible that your test can come back negative but you can still end up getting sick later. You must stay confined at home and avoid all contact with others for 14 days since your last contact.
If you begin to feel sick and start to show symptoms, you should try to get tested. 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 FAQ resource.

**What do I do if I start to feel sick?**

If you start to feel sick, you should assume you have COVID-19 and that you can spread the coronavirus to others. You should try to get tested to confirm whether you have COVID-19 or not. 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 FAQ.

Similar to quarantining yourself, now that you are feeling sick you must isolate yourself. Whereas quarantine is used by people who have been exposed to the coronavirus but are not yet sick, isolation is used by people who are sick. In isolation, you also must separate yourself from others and avoid all contact with others. Only leave your home to get tested or to seek medical care. To learn how to isolate effectively at home and for how long, please see the “I Tested Positive for COVID-19, What Now?” resource.

**If I was exposed to the coronavirus but never got sick after 14 days, does that mean I am immune to the virus?**

No. Even though you were exposed, it is possible that the coronavirus never entered your body. As a result, if you were to be exposed again, you would have the same chance of getting sick as you did the first time you were exposed. You are still susceptible to getting the coronavirus and getting sick.

**Is there any medicine I should take if I think I was exposed to COVID-19 that can stop the virus?**

Currently, there are no widely available treatments that can either prevent or cure COVID-19 that have been approved by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA). There will be no cure until a vaccine is developed, which will not be available for many months. No medications, supplements, or other products can cure or prevent you from getting COVID-19. Anyone advertising products as being “anti-COVID-19” or “anti-coronavirus” are using untruthful advertising to make money off your fear. Many of these products, since they have not been regulated, might also have negative consequences for your health. There is no medication you should take if you think you were exposed to COVID-19.
Information for this FAQ came from:

Johns Hopkins University:  
https://www.coursera.org/programs/new-york-city-contact-tracing-rvykz

Harvard Medical School:  
https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/treatments-for-covid-19

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):  

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):  

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):  

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control:  

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):  
https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/

S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) website:  

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www.coronavirusnetwork.org.

Please note that the guidance in this document does not substitute for the recommendations of your healthcare provider.