Working Together to Slow the Spread of COVID-19

How COVID-19 is Spreading

We are experiencing a pandemic of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) respiratory illness, which is caused by a new virus and spreading quickly from person to person. Because COVID-19 is a new illness, much is still unknown about it. However, the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), COVID-19 spreads mainly from person to person. This includes people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms, such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath, may appear 2-14 days after exposure. People are thought to be most contagious when they show symptoms, but some spread might be possible before people even feel sick.

Steps to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19

Because COVID-19 is new, people have no immunity against it and there isn’t yet a vaccine to prevent illness. That’s why public health officials are recommending community-wide mitigation strategies—such as staying home, physical (social) distancing and good hygiene practices—to slow the spread of COVID-19 and help keep everyone safe. Experts stress that slowing the spread of COVID-19 is critical to minimizing the number of people who get sick at the same time and protecting those at higher risk of severe illness.

We all have a role to play. Even if you are young or otherwise healthy, you are at risk and your activities can spread the virus to others. Let’s work together and do our part to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Now more than ever, remember to:

- **Clean your hands often** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water are always preferable, but if they are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** with unwashed hands to prevent the virus from entering your body through these areas.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes** with tissues, then throw them in the trash. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water are always preferable, but if they are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. If you are without a tissue, cough into your upper arm and then wash your upper arm with soap and water or if soap and water is not available use a hand sanitizer with 60% alcohol.
- **Clean and disinfect** household surfaces daily and high-touch surfaces frequently. High-touch surfaces include phones, remote controls, counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables. Learn more about cleaning and disinfecting from the CDC.
- **Stay connected but practice physical (social) distancing.** We need each other now more than ever. Stay connected with your loved ones through
video calls, phone calls, texts, or social media. But avoid group settings and mass gatherings. Maintain a physical distance (about 6 feet) between you and others while in public. Avoid close contact with people who do not share your home.

- **Take precautions if you are at higher risk for severe illness.** Based on currently available information, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes, might be at higher risk for severe illness. People with other high-risk conditions could include those with moderate to severe asthma, renal failure, liver disease or severe obesity, or those who are otherwise immunocompromised. People who are pregnant should be monitored since they are known to be at risk with severe viral illness; however, to date, data on COVID-19 has not shown increased risk. Call your health care provider for additional steps you may be able to take to protect yourself.

- **Listen to and follow the directions of your state and local authorities.**
  - Follow stay-at-home recommendations. Staying at home means that you remain at home and only go out to purchase essential supplies, visit medical professionals or leave during an emergency. Unless you are showing signs of illness or have tested positive for COVID-19, going outside to exercise and walk pets is okay. Remember to practice physical (social) distancing by keeping at least six feet away from others.
  - Follow isolation or quarantine instructions. Isolation and quarantine measures may sound scary, but they are designed to help prevent the spread of disease.
    > **Isolation** separates sick people from people who are not sick to help prevent the illness from spreading.
    > **Quarantine** separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to COVID-19 to see if they become sick. A quarantine helps to prevent people from unknowingly infecting anyone.

If you or someone in your household becomes sick, call a health care provider for medical advice and follow it.

People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 may be able to recover at home. If someone in your household has tested positive for COVID-19, keep the entire household at home. For detailed guidance, see What to Do If You Are Sick on redcross.org/coronavirus.

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**References:**

- cdc.gov
- mailman.columbia.edu
- hopkinsmedicine.org

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