Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

WEAR A MASK.

How to Protect Yourself & Others

Updated Nov. 4, 2020   Print

Older adults and people who have certain underlying conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 illness. More information on Are you at higher risk for serious illness.

Know how it spreads

- COVID-19 spreads easily from person to person, mainly by the following routes:
    - Between people who are in close contact with one another (within 6 feet).
    - Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, breathes, sings or talks.
        - Respiratory droplets cause infection when they are inhaled or deposited on mucous membranes, such as those that line the inside of the nose and mouth.
- People who are infected but do not have symptoms can also spread the virus to others.

Less common ways COVID-19 can spread

- Under certain circumstances (for example, when people are in enclosed spaces with poor ventilation), COVID-19 can sometimes be spread by airborne transmission.
- COVID-19 spreads less commonly through contact with contaminated surfaces.

Everyone Should

Wash your hands often

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- It's especially important to wash:
    - Before eating or preparing food
    - Before touching your face
    - After using the restroom
    - After leaving a public place
    - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
    - After handling your mask
    - After changing a diaper
    - After caring for someone sick

- After touching animals or pets
- If soap and water are not readily available, **use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol**. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** with unwashed hands.

Avoid close contact

- **Inside your home:** Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
  - If possible, maintain 6 feet between the person who is sick and other household members.
- **Outside your home:** Put 6 feet of distance between yourself and people who don't live in your household.
  - Remember that some people without symptoms may be able to spread virus.
  - Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) from other people.
  - Keeping distance from others is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.

Cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others

- You could spread COVID-19 to others even if you do not feel sick.
- The mask is meant to protect other people in case you are infected.
- Everyone should wear a mask in public settings and when around people who don't live in your household, especially when other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.
  - Masks should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- Do NOT use a mask meant for a healthcare worker. Currently, surgical masks and N95 respirators are critical supplies that should be reserved for healthcare workers and other first responders.
- Continue to keep about 6 feet between yourself and others. The mask is not a substitute for social distancing.

Cover coughs and sneezes

- **Always cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow and do not spit.
- **Throw used tissues** in the trash.
- Immediately **wash your hands** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Clean and disinfect

- **Clean AND disinfect** frequently touched surfaces **daily**. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.
- **If surfaces are dirty, clean them.** Use detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- **Then, use a household disinfectant.** Most common EPA-registered household disinfectants ⧉ will work.

Monitor Your Health Daily

- **Be alert for symptoms.** Watch for fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms of COVID-19.

- Especially important if you are running essential errands, going into the office or workplace, and in settings where it may be difficult to keep a physical distance of 6 feet.
- **Take your temperature** if symptoms develop.
  - Don't take your temperature within 30 minutes of exercising or after taking medications that could lower your temperature, like acetaminophen.
- Follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.

Protect Your Health This Flu Season

It's likely that flu viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 will **both** spread this fall and winter. Healthcare systems could be overwhelmed treating both patients with flu and patients with COVID-19. This means getting a flu vaccine during 2020-2021 is more important than ever.
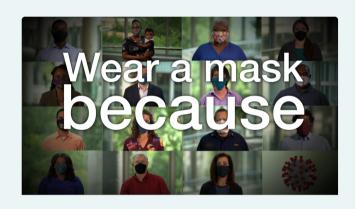
While getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19 there are many important benefits, such as:

1. Flu vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalization, and death.
2. Getting a flu vaccine can also save healthcare resources for the care of patients with COVID-19.

I wear a mask because...

CDC staff give their reasons for wearing a mask.

Wear a mask because...

Stop the Spread of Germs

Robert R. Redfield, MD | #COVIDStopsWithMe

CDC Director Robert R. Redfield, MD discusses how we can slow the spread of COVID-19.

COVID-19 Stop the Spread of Germs

Help stop the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses by following these steps.

Handwashing Resources

View handwashing video in Spanish

View handwashing video in French

Handwashing tips