



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
CDC 24/7: Saving Lives, Protecting People™



## COVID-19

**Get Vaccinated:** [Find a vaccine](#) and learn what you can do after you're [fully vaccinated](#).

# How COVID-19 Spreads

Updated May 10, 2021

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COVID-19 spreads when an infected person breathes out droplets and very small particles that contain the virus. These droplets and particles can be breathed in by other people or land on their eyes, noses, or mouth. In some circumstances, they may contaminate surfaces they touch. People who are closer than 6 feet from the infected person are most likely to get infected.

## Types of Spread

COVID-19 is spread in three main ways

1. Breathing in air when close to an infected person who is exhaling small droplets and particles that contain the virus.
2. Having these small droplets and particles that contain virus land on the eyes, nose, or mouth, especially through splashes and sprays like a cough or sneeze.
3. Touching eyes, nose, or mouth with hands that have the virus on them.

## Protect yourself and others

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. Protect yourself and others from all ways COVID-19 spreads by taking these prevention actions:

- Get a [COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you can](#).
- Wear a [mask that covers your nose and mouth](#) to help protect yourself and others.
- [Stay at least 6 feet apart from others](#) who don't live with you.
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces, and [improve ventilation](#).
- [Wash your hands often](#) with soap and water. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.

Learn more about what you can do to [protect yourself and others](#) and what you can do after you've been [fully vaccinated](#).

## How COVID-19 Spreads

Anyone infected with COVID-19 can spread it, even if they do **NOT** have symptoms.

To protect yourself against getting COVID-19 **from inhalation**:

- Get vaccinated.
- Wear a [mask that covers your nose and mouth](#) to help protect yourself and others.
- Stay 6 feet apart.
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces, and improve ventilation.

To protect yourself against getting COVID-19 **from splashes or sprays**:

- Get vaccinated.
- Wear [a mask that covers your nose and mouth](#) to help protect yourself and others.
- Stay 6 feet apart.
- Avoid crowds.

To protect yourself against getting COVID-19 **from touching your eyes, nose, or mouth:**

- Get vaccinated.
- Wear [a mask that covers your nose and mouth](#) to help protect yourself and others.
- Wash your hands.

## COVID-19 and animals

COVID-19 can spread **from people to animals** in some situations. Pet cats and dogs can sometimes become infected after close contact with people with COVID-19. Learn what you should do [if you have pets](#).

## Reinfection

Cases of [reinfection](#) with COVID-19 have been reported, but remain rare. CDC is actively working to learn more about reinfection to inform public health action.

### More Information

- [Scientific Brief: SARS-CoV-2 and Potential Airborne Transmission](#)
- [ASL Video Series: How does COVID-19 Spread?](#)

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Content source: [National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\)](#), Division of Viral Diseases