



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

MENU >



How COVID-19 Spreads

Updated Sept. 21, 2020

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A draft version of proposed changes to these recommendations was posted in error to the agency's official website. CDC is currently updating its recommendations regarding airborne transmission of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19). Once this process has been completed, the update language will be posted.

COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through close contact from person-to-person. Some people without symptoms may be able to spread the virus. We are still learning about how the virus spreads and the severity of illness it causes.

Person-to-person spread

The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.
- These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.
- COVID-19 may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms.

The virus spreads easily between people

How easily a virus spreads from person-to-person can vary. Some viruses are highly contagious, like measles, while other viruses do not spread as easily. Another factor is whether the spread is sustained, which means it goes from person-to-person without stopping.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading very easily and sustainably between people. Information from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic suggests that this virus is spreading more efficiently than influenza, but not as efficiently as measles, which is highly contagious. In general, **the more closely a person interacts with others and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread.**

The virus may be spread in other ways

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by **touching a surface or object that has the virus on it** and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. This is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads, but we are still learning more about how this virus spreads.

Spread between animals and people

- At this time, the risk of COVID-19 spreading **from animals to people** is considered to be low. Learn about [COVID-19 and pets and other animals](#).
- It appears that the virus that causes COVID-19 can spread **from people to animals** in some situations. CDC is aware of a small number of pets worldwide, including cats and dogs, reported to be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, mostly after close contact with people with COVID-19. Learn what you should do [if you have pets](#).

Protect yourself and others

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. You can take steps to slow the spread.

- [Maintain good social distance](#) (about 6 feet). This is very important in preventing the spread of COVID-19.
- [Wash your hands](#) often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- [Routinely clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a [mask](#) when around others.

Learn more about what you can do to [protect yourself and others](#).

More Information

[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](#)