

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

MENU >



How to Protect Yourself & Others

Updated Nov. 27, 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

- Masks help prevent you from getting or spreading the virus.
- You could spread COVID-19 to others even if you do not feel sick.
- 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](#)



[Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings](#)

More information

[Symptoms](#)

[What to do if you are sick](#)

[If someone in your house gets sick](#)

[Frequently asked questions](#)

[Travelers](#)

[Individuals, schools, events, businesses and more](#)

[Healthcare Professionals](#)

[10 Things You Can Do to Manage COVID-19 at Home](#)

[10 Things You Can Do to Manage COVID-19 at Home \(ASL Version\)](#)

[Social Distancing \(ASL Video\)](#)

[ASL Video Series: What You Need to Know About Handwashing](#)

Last Updated Nov. 27, 2020

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