

## Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

*This is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation and HCPH will provide updated information as it becomes available, in addition to updated guidance.*

### Disease Basics

#### **Q: What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?**

A: The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a very contagious respiratory virus first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China.

#### **Q: What is a novel coronavirus?**

A: A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

#### **Q: What is the source of COVID-19?**

A: Public health officials and partners are working hard to identify the source of the COVID-19. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some causing illness in people and others that circulate among animals, including camels, cats, and bats. SARS, another coronavirus that emerged to infect people, came from civet cats, while MERS, another coronavirus that emerged to infect people, came from camels. The recently emerged COVID-19 is not the same as the coronavirus that causes Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) or the coronavirus that causes Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

#### **Q: How does the virus spread?**

A: Most often, spread from person-to-person, happens among close contacts (within 6 feet for 30 minutes or longer). Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. 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, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. This virus probably originated from an animal source but is now spreading from person-to-person. COVID-19 is very new and doctors and scientists continue to investigate it. They have learned it can be transmitted by an infected person who doesn't have any symptoms (asymptomatic)

# Prevention

## Q: How can I help protect myself?

A: There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 or medicine to treat it. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus. CDC recommends social distancing, wearing face covering and good hygiene habits to help prevent it.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick and stay home if you are sick.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- 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.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash

\*Stay 6 feet away from anyone who doesn't live in your house with you. (Social Distancing)

\*When you are in public, if you can't maintain a 6 foot distance from others, the CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings or masks. Cloth face coverings can be made inexpensively from common items, such as T-shirts.

Tips for wearing your face coverings correctly include:

- Wash your hands before putting on your face covering
- Put it over your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin
- Try to fit it snugly against the sides of your face
- Make sure you can breathe easily
- **Don't** touch the face covering, and, if you do, wash your hands
- **Don't** put the covering around your neck or up on your forehead

## Q: What should I do if I had close contact with someone who has COVID-19?

A: If you have had close contact with someone who has COVID-19, call your healthcare provider immediately and describe the contact you have had. You can also receive free testing at one of our HCPH sites via <https://covcheck.hctx.net/> or calling 832-927-7575.

# Medical Information

## Q: What are the symptoms and complications that COVID-19 can cause?

A: People with COVID-19 can have no symptoms, mild symptoms or severe symptoms that can require hospitalization or cause death. The majority of people have mild symptoms. People in high risk groups, the elderly and those with underlying health conditions or compromised immune systems, are the most likely to have serious complications if they become infected with the virus.

Symptoms may appear **2-14 days after exposure to the virus** and can include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- Sudden loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

If you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, you should call ahead to a healthcare professional and describe your recent travel or close contacts.

- If you have had close contact with someone showing these symptoms who has recently traveled from this area, you should call ahead to a healthcare professional and describe your close contact and their recent travel.
- Older patients and individuals who have severe underlying medical conditions or are immunocompromised should contact their healthcare provider early, even if their illness is mild. If you have severe symptoms, such as persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or inability to arouse, or bluish lips of face, contact your healthcare provider or emergency room and seek care immediately.

**Q: Should I be tested for COVID-19?**

A: Since people can be infected without showing any symptoms, Harris County Public Health (HCPH) is recommending everyone get tested. Testing at HCPH sites is free and identifying people who are infected helps health officials prevent the virus from spreading further in the community.

Call your health professional or you can receive free testing at one of our HCPH sites via <https://covcheck.hctx.net/> or calling 832-927-7575. Viral tests check samples from your respiratory system (such as swabs of the inside of the nose) to tell you if you currently have an infection with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Some tests are point-of-care tests, meaning results may be available at the testing site in less than an hour. Other tests must be sent to a laboratory to analyze.

People with any of the above symptoms or who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 are strongly encouraged to get tested.

**Q: What to do after a test?**

A: Upon being tested at one of the HCPH testing sites, you will receive a handout of how to obtain your test results. It is important to continue to self-isolate and continue preventative practices. *ASSUME* you have the disease.

- **If you test positive for COVID-19**, know what protective steps to take [If You Are Sick or Caring for Someone](#).
- **If you test negative for COVID-19**, you probably were not infected at the time your sample was collected. However, that does not mean you will not get sick. It is possible that you were very early in your infection when your sample was collected and that you could test positive later. Or you could be exposed later and then develop illness. In other words, a negative test result does not mean you won't get sick later. This means you could still spread the virus.

## Public Health Response and Current Situation

**Q: What is CDC doing about COVID-19?**

A: This is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation, and CDC will continue to provide updated information as it becomes available. CDC works 24/7 to protect people's health. It is CDC's job to be concerned and move quickly whenever there is a potential public health problem.

# Travel

## Q: Should I cancel my international travel because of COVID-19?

A: Being in close contact with others, such as on an airplane, can increase your risk of being exposed to COVID-19, though airlines are implementing new procedures. CDC provides recommendations on postponing or canceling travel. They also issue travel notices that assess the potential health risks involved with traveling to a certain area. A list of destinations with travel notices is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

## Q: Is it safe to travel to visit family or friends?

A: Travel increases your chances of getting and spreading COVID-19. Before you travel, learn if coronavirus is spreading in your local area or in any of the places you are going. Traveling to visit family may be especially dangerous if you or your loved ones are [more likely to get very ill from COVID-19](#). People at higher risk for severe illness need to take [extra precautions](#).

## Q: What types of precautions should I take if I have to travel?

A: It depends on the type of travel, but the same COVID-19 prevention practices apply for any form of travel. Consider the following risks for getting or spreading COVID-19, depending on how you travel:

**Air Travel:** Air travel requires spending time in security lines and airport terminals, which can bring you in close contact with other people and frequently touched surfaces. Most viruses and other germs do not spread easily on flights because of how air circulates and is filtered on airplanes. However, social distancing is difficult on crowded flights, and you may have to sit near others (within 6 feet), sometimes for hours. This may increase your risk for exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19, though wearing a face covering may reduce your risk.

**Bus or Train Travel:** Traveling on buses and trains for any length of time can involve sitting or standing within 6 feet of others.

**Car Travel:** Making stops along the way for gas, food, or bathroom breaks can put you and your traveling companions in close contact with other people and surfaces.

**RV Travel:** You may have to stop less often for food or bathroom breaks, but RV travel typically means staying at RV parks overnight and getting gas and supplies at other public places. These stops may put you and those with you in the RV in close contact with others.

**Q: Is it safe to go on a cruise?**

A: Cruises put large numbers of people, often from countries around the world, in frequent and close contact with each other. This can promote the spread of respiratory viruses, such as the virus that causes COVID-19. You may get sick from close contact with an infected person or by touching contaminated surfaces.

- Older adults and travelers with underlying health issues should avoid situations that put them at increased risk for more severe disease. This entails avoiding crowded places, avoiding non-essential travel such as long plane trips, and especially avoiding embarking on cruise ships.
- Discuss cruise ship travel with your healthcare provider prior to travel.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
  - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Stay in your cabin when you are sick and let the onboard medical center know immediately if you develop a fever (100.4°F/38°C or higher), begin to feel feverish, or have other symptoms (such as cough, runny nose, shortness of breath, or sore throat).

**Q: Should businesses recommend face coverings or other protective equipment during travel?**

A: CDC recommends travelers wear face coverings to protect themselves from COVID-19. You may choose to wear a face covering, but it is important to take additional steps to reduce your risks.

We recommend that everyone follow everyday prevention practices:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning product.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol.

# COVID-19 and Animals

## **Q: Should I be concerned about pets or other animals and COVID-19?**

A: There are a few cases of pets who have contracted COVID-19 from people, but it doesn't appear pets can transmit the virus to people. It's always a good idea to wash your hands after being around animals. For more information on the many benefits of pet ownership, as well as staying safe and healthy around animals including pets, livestock, and wildlife, visit CDC's [Healthy Pets, Healthy People website](#).

## **Q: Should I avoid contact with pets or other animals if I am sick?**

A: You should restrict contact with pets and other animals while you are sick with COVID-19, just like you would around other people. When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick. If you are sick with COVID-19, avoid contact with your pet, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with pets and wear a face covering.

Source of information: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

