



Frequently Asked Questions

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Basics

[What is COVID-19?](#)



COVID-19 is a disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Most people with COVID-19 have mild [symptoms](#), but some people become severely ill. Older adults and people who have [certain underlying medical conditions](#) are more likely to get severely ill. Post-COVID conditions are a wide range of health problems people can experience four or more weeks after first getting COVID-19. Even those who do not become severely ill from COVID-19 may experience [post-COVID conditions](#).

Spread

[How does the virus spread?](#)



COVID-19 is spread in three main ways:

- Breathing in air when close to an infected person who is exhaling small droplets and particles that contain the virus.
- 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.
- Touching eyes, nose, or mouth with hands that have the virus on them.

Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected. Each health department determines community spread differently based on local conditions. For information on community spread in your area, please visit your [local health department's website](#).

What are COVID-19 Community Levels?



[COVID-19 Community Levels](#) are a tool to help communities decide what prevention steps to take based on the latest data. Levels can be low, medium, or high and are determined by looking at the percent of hospital beds being used by patients with COVID-19, the rate of new hospital admissions in the population, and the rate of new COVID-19 cases in the community. People can take different steps depending on the [COVID-19 Community Level](#) in their area.

Prevention

How can I protect myself?



Visit the [How to Protect Yourself & Others](#) page to learn about how to protect yourself from COVID-19.

If You Have COVID-19

What are the recommendations for someone who has symptoms of COVID-19?



If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or think you might have COVID-19, follow the steps below to care for yourself and to help protect other people in your home and community.

- Stay at home (except to get tested or to get medical care).
- Wear a well-fitting mask around other people for 10 days.
- Do not travel for 10 days.
- Separate yourself from others.
- Monitor your symptoms.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Wash your hands often.
- Clean surfaces in your home regularly.
- Avoid sharing personal household items.

For more information, see [What to Do If You Are Sick](#).

What should I do if I test positive for COVID-19?



If you receive a positive test result, you should

- Stay home for at least 5 days and [isolate](#) from others in your home.
- Tell your [close contacts](#).
- Wear a [well-fitting mask](#) when around others. If available, a N95 or KN95 respirator is recommended.

- Watch for [symptoms](#). If you have any [emergency warning signs](#), seek emergency care immediately.
 - Tell your healthcare provider. Contact them as soon as possible if:
 - Your symptoms get worse.
 - You are more likely to get very sick because you are an [older adult](#) or have an [underlying medical condition](#). [Possible treatment](#) may be available for you.
 - You have questions about your isolation.
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If You Come into Close Contact with Someone with COVID-19

What should I do if I have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19?

People who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19—excluding people who have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days or who are [up to date](#) with COVID-19 vaccines.

- People who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 90 days and recovered do not have to [quarantine](#) or get tested again as long as they do not develop new symptoms.
- People who develop symptoms again within 3 months of their first bout of COVID-19 may need to be tested again if there is no other cause identified for their symptoms.
- People who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 are not required to quarantine if they are [up to date](#) with COVID-19 vaccines and do not have symptoms.

For more information, see [Quarantine and Isolation](#) and [What to Do If You Are Sick](#).

Children

What is the risk of my child becoming sick with COVID-19?

Children can be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 and can get sick with COVID-19. While most children with COVID-19 have mild symptoms or they may have no symptoms at all (“asymptomatic”), children can still become very ill and even die from COVID-19. Babies younger than 1 and children with [certain underlying medical conditions](#) are more likely to become very ill from COVID-19. Some children have developed a rare but serious disease that is linked to COVID-19 called [multisystem inflammatory syndrome \(MIS-C\)](#).

For more information about how people get sick with the virus that causes COVID-19, see [How COVID-19 Spreads](#).

What is multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C)?

Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) is a rare but serious condition associated with COVID-19 where different body parts can become inflamed, including the heart, lungs, kidneys, brain, skin, eyes, or gastrointestinal organs. For information, see [MIS-C](#).

Symptoms and Emergency Warning Signs

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

People with COVID-19 have reported a wide range of issues from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. If you have fever, cough, or other [symptoms](#), you might have COVID-19.

When should I seek emergency care if I have COVID-19?

Look for [emergency warning signs](#)* of COVID-19. If someone is showing any of these signs, seek emergency medical care immediately:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone

*This list is not all possible symptoms. Please call your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you.

Testing

Are at-home tests available?

Yes. At-home tests for COVID-19 give rapid results and can be taken anywhere, regardless of your vaccination status or whether or not you have symptoms.

They detect current infection and are sometimes also called “self-tests,” or “over-the-counter (OTC) tests.”

How to get an at-home test kit

- Order 4 free at-home tests per household at [COVIDtests.gov](#) [↗](#) . Free at-home tests are also available through [local health departments](#).
- Buy at-home tests online or in pharmacies and retail stores. Private health insurance may reimburse the cost of purchasing at-home tests. Visit [FDA's website](#) [↗](#) for a list of authorized tests.
- If you're not able to obtain an at-home test when you need it, visit a community testing site or call your local health department for more options.

For more information, see [At-Home Testing](#).

Should I be tested for COVID-19?

You should get tested for COVID-19:

- If you have [symptoms of COVID-19](#).
- At least 5 days after you last had close contact with someone with COVID-19, even if you don't develop symptoms (you do not have to get tested if you have already tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days.)
- You are going to an indoor event or a gathering
- Before and after [travel](#)

For COVID-19 screening ([schools](#), [workplaces](#), [congregate settings](#), etc.)

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For more information on testing, see

- [Testing for COVID-19](#)
- [Self-Testing at Home or Anywhere](#)
- [Test for Current Infection](#)
- [Test for Past Infection](#)

Can someone test negative and later test positive on a viral test for COVID-19?



Yes, it is possible. A negative test does not rule out an infection.

- If you have a negative test but have symptoms of COVID-19, you may have tested before the virus was detectable or you may have another illness, such as the flu.
- If you do not have symptoms of COVID-19 but were a [close contact](#) to someone with COVID-19 and you tested negative 5 days after exposure, that means the virus was not detected by the test. You are likely not infected, but an infection cannot be completely ruled out.

Even if you test negative, you still should take steps to [protect yourself and others](#). See [Testing for Current Infection](#) for more information.

Contact Tracing

What is contact tracing?



[Contact tracing](#) has been used for decades by state and local health departments to slow or stop the spread of infectious diseases. Contact tracing for COVID-19 is recommended for specific high-risk settings, such as long-term care facilities, correctional facilities, and homeless shelters, and groups at increased risk.

Contact tracing slows the spread of COVID-19 by

- Letting people know they may have been exposed to COVID-19 and should monitor their health for signs and [symptoms of COVID-19](#)
- Helping people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 get tested
- Asking people to [self-isolate](#) if they have COVID-19.
- Recommending close contacts [quarantine](#), get [tested](#), and wear well-fitting [masks](#) after exposure to COVID-19, depending on vaccination status and history of prior COVID-19 diagnosis within the past 90 days

Health departments may not provide contact tracing services to every person with COVID-19. You should [notify your own close contacts](#) of their potential exposure as quickly as possible so they can follow recommendations to [quarantine](#), get tested and wear a well-fitting mask.

What will happen with my personal information during contact tracing?



Discussions with health department staff are confidential. This means that your personal and medical information will be kept private and only shared with those who may need to know, like your health care provider.

If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, your name will not be shared with your close contacts. If you meet the local criteria to be interviewed, the health department will only notify people you were in [close contact](#) with that they might have been exposed to COVID-19. Each state and jurisdiction use their own method for collecting and protecting health

Who is considered a close contact of someone with COVID-19?




For COVID-19, a [close contact](#) is anyone who was less than 6 feet away from an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, *three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes*) – [excluding K-12 school settings](#). An infected person can spread COVID-19 starting from 2 days before they have any symptoms (or, if they are asymptomatic, 2 days before their specimen that tested positive was collected), until they meet the criteria for [discontinuing isolation](#). You can use this tool to help determine who is a close contact: [How to Determine a Close Contact for COVID-19](#).

I have COVID-19. How do I tell the people I was around?



If you have COVID-19, tell your close contacts you have COVID-19 so that they can follow CDC guidance for close contacts. Recommendations for close contacts to [quarantine](#), get [tested](#), and wear well-fitting [masks](#) after exposure to COVID-19 will vary depending on vaccination status and history of prior COVID-19 diagnosis within the past 90 days. See [COVID-19 Quarantine and Isolation](#) for more information. By letting your [close contacts](#) know they may have been exposed to COVID-19, you are helping to protect them and others within your community.

You can call, text, or email your contacts. If you would like to stay anonymous, there is also an online tool that allows you to tell your contacts by sending out emails or text notifications anonymously (www.tellyourcontacts.org ).

Does mask use help determine if someone is considered a close contact?



Except in K-12 school settings, a person is still considered a [close contact](#) even if one or both people wore a mask when they were together.

If I am a close contact, will I be tested for COVID-19?



If you have been in [close contact](#) with someone who has COVID-19, you should be tested at least 5 days after your last close contact, even if you do not have symptoms of COVID-19. If you have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days, you should not be tested again. The health department may be able to provide resources for testing in your area.

For more information, see [COVID-19 Contact Tracing](#).

Watch for or monitor your [symptoms of COVID-19](#). If your symptoms worsen or become severe, seek medical care.

Pets and Animals

Can I get COVID-19 from my pets or other animals?



The risk of animals spreading COVID-19 to people is low. See [If You Have Pets](#) for more information about pets and COVID-19.

Can animals carry the virus that causes COVID-19 on their skin or fur?



Although we know certain bacteria and fungi can be carried on fur and hair, there is no evidence that viruses, including the virus that causes COVID-19, can spread to people from the skin, fur, or hair of pets.

Can I use hand sanitizer on pets?



Do not wipe or bathe your pet with chemical disinfectants, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or other products, such as hand sanitizer, counter-cleaning wipes, or other industrial or surface cleaners. Talk to your veterinarian if you have questions about products for bathing or cleaning your pet. If your pet gets hand sanitizer on their skin or fur, rinse or wipe down your pet with water immediately. If your pet ingests hand sanitizer (such as by chewing the bottle) or is showing signs of illness after use, contact your veterinarian or pet poison control immediately.

What should I do if my pet gets sick and I think it's COVID-19?




Pets infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 may or may not get sick. Of the pets that have gotten sick, most only had mild illness and fully recovered. Serious illness in pets is extremely rare. Most pets that have gotten sick from the virus that causes COVID-19 were infected after close contact with a person with COVID-19. Pets may have fever, coughing, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, lethargy (unusual lack of energy or sluggishness), sneezing, runny nose, eye discharge, vomiting, or diarrhea. If your pet is sick and you think it might be from the virus that causes COVID-19, talk to your veterinarian.

Can wild animals spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to people?





Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that wildlife might be a source of infection for people in the United States. The risk of getting COVID-19 from wild animals is low. For more information on handling wildlife, see [Reducing the Risk of SARS-CoV-2 Spreading between People and Wildlife](#).

Can bats in the United States get the virus that causes COVID-19, and can they spread it back to people?



Other coronaviruses have been found in North American bats in the past, but there is currently no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 is present in bats in the United States. In general, coronaviruses do not cause illness or death in bats, but we don't yet know if this new coronavirus would make North American species of bats sick. Bats are an important part of natural ecosystems, and their populations are already declining in the United States. Bat populations could be further threatened by the disease itself or by harm inflicted on bats resulting from a misconception that bats are spreading COVID-19. However, there is no evidence that bats in the United States are a source of the virus that causes COVID-19 for people. Further studies are needed to understand if and how bats could be affected by COVID-19.

Help control the spread of rumors and be aware of fraud schemes.

- [Coronavirus Rumor Control](#)  (FEMA)
- [COVID-19 Fraud Alert](#)  (Office of the Inspector General)