

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Prevention: 12 Tips and Strategies

Tips

Importance

When to call your doctor

Takeaway

This article was updated on April 8, 2020 to include additional guidance on using face masks.

The new coronavirus is officially called SARS-CoV-2, which stands for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2. An infection with this virus can lead to coronavirus disease 19, or COVID-19.

SARS-CoV-2 is related to the coronavirus SARS-CoV, which caused another kind of coronavirus disease in 2002 to 2003.

However, from what we know so far, SARS-CoV-2 is different from other viruses, including other coronaviruses.

The evidence shows that SARS-CoV-2 may be transmitted more easily and cause life-threatening illness in some people.

Like other coronaviruses, it can survive in the air and on surfaces long enough for someone to contract it.

It's possible that you could acquire SARS-CoV-2 if you touch your mouth, nose, or eyes after touching a surface or object that has the virus on it. However, this is not thought to be the main way that the virus spreads

However, SARS-CoV-2 multiplies faster in the body even when you don't have symptoms. Additionally, you can transmit the virus even if you never get symptoms at all.

Some people have mild to moderate symptoms only, while others have severe COVID-19 symptoms.

Here are the medical facts to help us understand how to best protect ourselves and others.

[name removed]'S CORONAVIRUS COVERAGE

Stay informed with our live updates about the current COVID-19 outbreak.

Also, visit our coronavirus hub for more information on how to prepare, advice on prevention and treatment, and expert recommendations.

Tips for prevention

Follow the guidelines to help protect yourself from contracting and transmitting SARS-CoV-2.

1. Wash your hands frequently and carefully

Use warm water and soap and rub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Work the lather to your wrists, between your fingers, and under your fingernails. You can also use an antibacterial and antiviral soap.

Use hand sanitizer when you cannot wash your hands properly. Rewash your hands several times a day, especially after touching anything, including your phone or laptop.

2. Avoid touching your face

SARS-CoV-2 can live on some surfaces for up to 72 hours. You can get the virus on your hands if you touch a surface like:

- gas pump handle
- your cell phone
- a doorknob

Avoid touching any part of your face or head, including your mouth, nose, and eyes. Also avoid biting your fingernails. This can give SARS-CoV-2 a chance to go from your hands into your body.

3. Stop shaking hands and hugging people — for now

Similarly, avoid touching other people. Skin-to-skin contact can transmit SARS-CoV-2 from one person to another.

4. Don't share personal items

Do not share personal items like:

- phones
- makeup
- combs

It's also important not to share eating utensils and straws. Teach children to recognize their reusable cup, straw, and other dishes for their own use only.

5. Cover your mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze

SARS-CoV-2 is found in high amounts in the nose and mouth. This means it can be carried by air droplets to other people when you cough, sneeze, or talk. It can also land on hard surfaces and stay there for up to 3 days.

Use a tissue or sneeze into your elbow to keep your hands as clean as possible. Wash your hands carefully after you sneeze or cough, regardless.

6. Clean and disinfect surfaces

Use alcohol-based disinfectants to clean hard surfaces in your home like:

- countertops
- door handles
- furniture
- toys

Also, clean your phone, laptop, and anything else you use regularly several times a day.

Disinfect areas after you bring groceries or packages into your home.

Use white vinegar or hydrogen peroxide solutions for general cleaning in between disinfecting surfaces.

7. Take physical (social) distancing seriously

If you're carrying the SARS-CoV-2 virus, it'll be found in high amounts in your spit (sputum). This can happen even if you don't have symptoms.

Physical (social) distancing, also means staying home and working remotely when possible.

If you must go out for necessities, keep a distance of 6 feet (2 m) from other people. You can transmit the virus by speaking to someone in close contact to you.

8. Do not gather in groups

Being in a group or gathering makes it more likely that you'll be in close contact with someone.

This includes avoiding all religious places of worship, as you may have to sit or stand too close to another congregant. It also includes not congregating at parks or beaches.

9. Avoid eating or drinking in public places

Now is not the time to go out to eat. This means avoiding restaurants, coffee shops, bars, and other eateries.

The virus can be transmitted through food, utensils, dishes, and cups. It may also be temporarily airborne from other people in the venue.

You can still get delivery or takeaway food. Choose foods that are thoroughly cooked and can be reheated.

High heat (at least 132°F/56°C, according to one recent, not-yet-peer-reviewed lab study) helps to kill coronaviruses.

This means it may be best to avoid cold foods from restaurants and all food from buffets and open salad bars.

10. Wash fresh groceries

Wash all produce under running water before eating or preparing.

The CDC

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and the FDA

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do not recommend using soap, detergent, or commercial produce wash on things like fruits and vegetables. Be sure to wash hands before and after handling these items.

11. Wear a (homemade) mask

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends

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that almost everyone wears a cloth face mask in public settings where physical distancing may be difficult, such as grocery stores.

When used correctly, these masks can help prevent people who are asymptomatic or undiagnosed from transmitting SARS-CoV-2 when they breathe, talk, sneeze, or cough. This, in turn, slows the transmission of the virus.

The CDC's website provides instructions

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for making your own mask at home, using basic materials such as a T-shirt and scissors.

Some pointers to keep in mind:

- Wearing a mask alone will not prevent you from getting a SARS-CoV-2 infection. Careful handwashing and physical distancing must also be followed.
- Cloth masks aren't as effective as other types of masks, such as surgical masks or N95 respirators. However, these other masks should be reserved for healthcare workers and first responders.
- Wash your hands before you put on your mask.
- Wash your mask after each use.
- You can transfer the virus from your hands to the mask. If you're wearing a mask, avoid touching the front of it.
- You can also transfer the virus from the mask to your hands. Wash your hands if you touch the front of the mask.
- A mask shouldn't be worn by a child under 2 years old, a person who has trouble breathing, or a person who can't remove the mask on their own.

12. Self-quarantine if sick

Call your doctor if you have any symptoms. Stay home until you recover. Avoid sitting, sleeping, or eating with your loved ones even if you live in the same home.

Wear a mask and wash your hands as much as possible. If you need urgent medical care, wear a mask and let them know you may have COVID-19.

Why are these measures so important?

Following the guidelines diligently is important because SARS-CoV-2 is different than other coronaviruses, including the one it's most similar to, SARS-CoV.

Ongoing medical studies show exactly why we must protect ourselves and others from getting a SARS-CoV-2 infection.

Here's how SARS-CoV-2 may cause more problems than other viruses:

You may not have symptoms

You can carry or have a SARS-CoV-2 infection without any symptoms at all. This means you may unknowingly transmit it to more vulnerable people who may become very ill.

You can still spread the virus

You can transmit, or pass on, the SARS-CoV-2 virus before you have any symptoms.

In comparison, SARS-CoV was mainly only infectious days after symptoms began. This means that people who had the infection knew they were ill and were able to stop the transmission.

It has a longer incubation time

SARS-CoV-2 may have a longer incubation time. This means that the time between getting the infection and developing any symptoms is longer than other coronaviruses.

According to the CDC

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, SARS-CoV-2 has an incubation period of 2 to 14 days. This means that someone who's carrying the virus may come into contact with many people before symptoms begin.

You may get sicker, faster

SARS-CoV-2 may make you more unwell much earlier. Viral loads — how many viruses you're carrying — were highest 10 days after symptoms began for SARS CoV-1.

In comparison, doctors in China who tested 82 people with COVID-19 found that the viral load peaked 5 to 6 days after symptoms began.

This means that the SARS-CoV-2 virus may multiply and spread in someone who has COVID-19 disease almost twice as fast as other coronavirus infections.

It can stay alive in the air

Lab tests show that both SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV can stay alive in the air for up to 3 hours.

Other hard surfaces like countertops, plastics, and stainless steel can harbor both viruses. The virus may stay on plastic for 72 hours and 48 hours on stainless steel.

SARS-CoV-2 can live for 24 hours on cardboard and 4 hours on copper — a longer time than other coronaviruses.

You may be very contagious

Even if you do not have symptoms, you can have the same viral load (number of viruses) in your body as a person who has severe symptoms.

This means you may be just as likely to be contagious as someone who has COVID-19. In comparison, other previous coronaviruses caused lower viral loads and only after symptoms were present.

Your nose and mouth are more susceptible

A 2020 report noted that the new coronavirus likes to move into your nose more than in the throat and other parts of the body.

This means that you may be more likely to sneeze, cough, or breathe SARS-CoV-2 out into the air around you.

It may travel through the body faster

The new coronavirus may travel through the body faster than other viruses. Data from China found that people with COVID-19 have the virus in their nose and throat only 1 day after symptoms begin.

When to call your doctor

Call your doctor if you think you or a family member may have a SARS-CoV-2 infection or if you have any symptoms of COVID-19.

Do not go to a medical clinic or hospital unless it's an emergency. This helps to avoid transmitting the virus.

Be extra watchful for worsening symptoms if you or your loved one has an underlying condition that may give you a higher chance of getting severe COVID-19, such as:

- asthma or other lung disease
- diabetes
- heart disease
- low immune system

The CDC

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advises getting emergency medical attention if you have COVID-19 warning signs. These include:

- difficulty breathing
- pain or pressure in the chest
- blue-tinged lips or face
- confusion
- drowsiness and inability to wake

The bottom line

Taking these prevention strategies seriously is extremely important to stop the transmission of this virus.

Practicing good hygiene, following these guidelines, and encouraging your friends and family to do the same will go a long way in preventing the transmission of SARS-CoV-2.

Last medically reviewed on June 4, 2020