

Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic, A Physician's Perspective

How do I prevent getting COVID-19?

--You or anyone can be spreading the virus and have no symptoms.

--Prevention is best achieved by physical distancing of 6 feet from one another; you can still socialize but 6 feet is the current best estimate of a safe distance. Masks also help decrease transmission from your hands to your face. Wash your hands frequently with hot water and soap; each washing should be for 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice).

Should I wear a mask?

--Though it is now directed by SECDEF and recommended by CDC to wear a mask if they cannot maintain six feet social distancing in public areas or work centers, wearing a cloth mask does not completely prevent infection. However, it might reduce your chance of spreading the infection if you are infected but have no symptoms. Masks should be worn in closed spaces such as grocery stores, buses, and at home if you are on quarantine. N-95 masks should be prioritized for health care workers to prevent them from becoming ill while taking care of COVID-19 infected patients.

Coronavirus facts:

--Most illness from COVID-19 resolve on their own and are mild cases in about 80% of individuals infected. No one has prior immunity. The best information at this time is that the incubation period averages up to five days but can be longer. Therefore, wash your hands frequently and maintain the six foot person to person space.

--The overall mortality rate is currently estimated by the CDC to be between 0.5% to 5 %; this is average across all geographic areas and all age groups. For the US, the overall rate of mortality is 1.7% and for the entire world, 4.6%. This is an OVER estimate since not everyone has been tested.

--Death rate does increase with age; deaths in children under 9 years old are rare. Many people under the age of 19 yrs have a mild case or have no symptoms if they are infected. Young people can end up on ventilators but this is uncommon; older healthy people may not be at any higher risk than young, healthy people. Having a major medical illness can increase an individual's risk for infection.

Symptoms are usually respiratory

--Usually COVID-19 infection presents with fever (88%), dry cough (60%), shortness of breath or difficulty breathing (55%), fatigue (35%), thick sputum (30%) and decreased ability to taste or smell (30%).

--Sore throat, chills, headache, muscle aches, nausea and diarrhea might reflect occurrence of COVID with a cold or the flu but are not the principle signs of COVID infection alone.

How can I tell if it's the flu, a cold or COVID?

Unnecessary worry can result from over diagnosis of common cold and flu symptoms.
This table is a rough guide.

Symptoms	Coronavirus	Flu	Cold	Allergy
Fever	Common	Prominent	Rare	Rare
Cough (Dry)	Common	Prominent	Common/Mild	Common
Shortness of Breath	Sometimes	No	No	Common
Fatigue	Sometimes	Prominent	Sometimes/Mild	Sometimes
Thick Sputum	Sometimes	Common	Common	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Sometimes	Sometimes	Common	Sometimes
Headaches	Sometimes	Common	Rare	Rare
Aches and Pains	Sometimes	Prominent	Common/Mild	Rare
Runny or Stuffy Nose	Rare	Sometimes	Common	Common
Diarrhea	Rare	Sometimes (in kids)	No	Sometimes
Sneezing	None	None	Common	Common

If you have any COVID symptoms:

- Call your doctor's office or an emergency room promptly for guidance. **Do NOT leave home unless instructed to get tested.**
- Stay home for 14 days for fever, dry cough, or difficulty breathing, even if mild. Rest. Keep 6 feet away from others. Minimize social contact. Drink plenty of liquids.
- If you test positive, same as above, but wear a facemask to reduce risk to family members, and stay in one room as much as possible
- When coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with your elbow sleeve (not your hands) or a tissue. Put the tissue into the toilet or trash (do not carry in your pockets), preferably a plastic-lined garbage can, then immediately wash hands vigorously with soap for 20 seconds.
- Change towels and wash cloths frequently. Place towels and laundry into a closed plastic-lined container after use.
- Call medical again or go to emergency room *promptly* if you get an increase in breathing difficulties or extreme fatigue.

OTHER PRECAUTIONS YOU CAN TAKE AT HOME:

Stay-at-home, going out only for emergency medical care, food and pharmacy supplies, travel to an essential job, dog walks, and maybe exercise. Veer 6-8 feet from others on a sidewalk (with a smile). Minimize touching of all public surfaces, and wash immediately before and after. Go out to buy food as few times as possible, preferably once weekly in the early morning or late

evening to avoid crowds. Or get deliveries. Keep 2 weeks of food at home in case anyone gets sick. Get medication supplies and OTCs in place. No public events, playdates or sleepovers. No visits to friends, elderly, or sick people. Stay home with family. Wash after contacts, including with pets.

COPING STRATEGIES

--Keep your mind busy, keep in touch, and rotate through different activities to avoid fatigue.:

--Videochat/text/call friends and family. Read books, magazines, or junk. Watch TV or videos (max 2 hours at a time). Open the window for fresh air. Take a break from the news. Play with kids. Home-school. Listen to music.

--Take a bath. Cook something new. Play with the dog (then wash hands). Take an online course that's not too challenging. Wash your hands and face again. Re-read old books. Check out GoodReads.com. Learn to play videogames.

--Meditate, or listen to guided meditation to learn. Write a song about the virus. Clean or reorganize your place. Google "pandemics" or "COVID kindness." Organize a weekly videomeeting or a sing-along with friends on zoom. Arrange a virtual dinner with friends. Or a virtual family work-out session.

—Move your body to get your blood circulating: Stretch, exercise, march around, make noise (if infected, without sweating or respiratory strain). Eat artfully (avoid boredom eating). Keep a normal wake-sleep cycle (don't sleep in or stay up late). Push fluids. Shower. Wear nice clothes. Manage/anticipate stress thoughtfully.

--If You Like To Talk, Talk with everyone about the enormous changes, of living with restrictions for a while, of adapting to risk and uncertainty, and of fears and losses. **Keep in touch. Keep in touch. Keep in touch.**

—With young children, help them understand that the adults are dealing with something important but manageable, that many people are getting sick and many people are helping the sick people, and that everyone washing their hands and face helps prevent sickness. Acknowledge your feelings without burdening them.

—With adolescents who can't see getting grounded to avoid danger, show them that distancing is an act of generosity and idealism by helping restore normalcy to their neighborhood and preserving valued friends in their lives. Help everyone whose fear comes out as anger or indifference.

Finally, REMAIN CALM, get facts, address fears, use [cdc.gov/coronavirus website for information](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus).

-- Avoid being an Internet Doctor"; it takes years of education, training and experience to interpret signs and symptoms and know who, when and why they may or may not be COVID-19 versus one of another thousand respiratory conditions.