

#StoptheSpread: A Patient Guide to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The nation's emergency physicians are on the frontlines of treatment and prevention of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). You should take appropriate precautions and consider simple steps to minimize your risk of getting or spreading the virus.

The American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) has developed materials for patients, policymakers and health professionals, each subject to change as the situation evolves.

For clinical and advocacy information, visit www.acep.org/COVID19

For patient information, visit www.emergencyphysicians.org/COVID19

Frequently Asked Questions

What should you do if you think you are sick with COVID-19?

1. Consider your symptoms.

Call your doctor if you've been in contact with someone who already has COVID-19 or has traveled to an affected region and within 14 days you develop the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is allowing anyone to get tested for COVID-19 with a physician's referral. However, it will take time for the health care system to ramp up its testing capabilities and locations. Tests should be reserved for those who meet the criteria for COVID-19 risk.

Emergency departments do not have a cure for COVID-19. If you are experiencing fever that responds to acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen and a cough, and you are young and otherwise healthy, treat yourself as you would for a bad cold or flu. If you have shortness of breath that is new for you, call your doctor.

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2. If your symptoms are mild, contact your primary care physician to discuss your best options for care.

While you do not need to call ahead for the emergency department, it is important to **know when to go**.

3. Call 911 or visit your closest emergency department if:

- You're experiencing a medical emergency,
- You're sick enough that you need to go to the hospital, especially if you recently started experiencing shortness of breath, or
- You're sick and you are a high-risk individual, such as an older patient or a person with an already weakened immune system.

How is COVID-19 treated?

COVID-19 can be treated like many viral infections; acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain and fever relief, food and fluids, good hygiene, rest and appropriate distance from others. Vaccines are in various early stages of development, and it may take time to achieve widespread access.

How dangerous is COVID-19? Who is at risk?

Those at risk include people who have been in contact with a person who already has COVID-19, or with someone who recently traveled to China or other affected regions.

Most of the people infected with the virus have experienced mild symptoms and then recovered.

While COVID-19 is more prevalent than other viruses in the broader coronavirus family, it is far less deadly. Most of the cases thus far are mild. However, researchers are still determining how fatal the virus is as the outbreak unfolds. High-risk individuals include older people, especially those with chronic or pre-existing medical conditions, or those with an already weakened immune system.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is regularly updating information here:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

How does it spread?

Like other respiratory viruses, scientists believe COVID-19 spreads from person to person via tiny droplets of saliva when you cough or sneeze. You can contract the virus by touching a contaminated surface and then touching your nose or eyes. The virus can live up to nine hours, though it is likely only contagious for one to two hours. It's smart to avoid touching your face, and make sure you cough or sneeze into your arm or a tissue.

You're not at risk simply walking by a person with a confirmed case of COVID-19, according to analysis in [JACEP Open](#), however, it's smart practice to stay three to six feet away from anyone who is ill.

It's currently unknown if people who have an early stage of the virus but do not yet show symptoms can transfer it to another individual.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting or spreading the virus?

Practice good hygiene. Wash your hands before eating and frequently through the day. Wash with soap and water for 20 seconds or two verses of "Happy Birthday." Sneeze into your arm or a tissue.

Prepare your home. Most household cleansers can kill coronavirus. Clean the surfaces (door handles, tables, railings) that get touched regularly, at least once per day, especially if there are sick people in your house or in your community. Give phones, electronic devices, TV remote controls, toys or other shared products a wipe or spray with disinfectant.

Limit your time in crowded public spaces to limit your risk of exposure. Stay home if you have a cough or don't feel well, evaluate whether to cancel events or appearances, and be prepared for schools to close or telework situations if your employer allows. When health experts talk about "avoiding close contact," generally that means stay three to six feet away from anyone who is ill.

Prioritize your health. Get a good night's rest, eat healthy and exercise. Make sure you are staying regular with your medications, if you take them. Factors like stress or poor nutrition weaken the body's immune response. Get a flu shot, it is not too late. Focus your energy so that you are calm, taking appropriate precautions and staying informed.

Make sure you have essential foods and medications. Shop with purpose and aim for a seven- to 14-day supply so that if you don't feel well, due to coronavirus or other illness, you can stay home until you recover. Make sure your prescriptions are stocked and up to date.

Create a [Family Disaster Preparedness Plan](#) and a supply kit that includes water or hydrating drinks, nonperishable food, and fever reducers like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. The preparedness plan should include a process for making sure every family member gets proper care, including medication schedules. Think through care scenarios for older relatives or alternative childcare arrangements for children.

Do I need to wear a mask?

Face masks are designed to prevent the spread of droplets from coughing or sneezing. There are two kinds; face masks (loose fitting) and N95 respirators. There is no need for healthy individuals to wear a face mask. Face masks should only be worn by individuals with respiratory infections, health care workers, and people taking care of somebody, or in close contact with somebody who has a respiratory infection. However, if you come to the emergency department with respiratory symptoms, they will ask you to use a mask. Though it may be a little uncomfortable, it is for the staff's protection.

Should I be concerned about contaminated toys or products shipping from Asia or other parts where there are outbreaks?

By the time a product makes its way to the U.S., it has likely been longer than the nine hours that the virus could linger on that surface—even though it's contagious for one to two hours. You can still give toys, electronics, phones or other products a wipe or spray with disinfectant. There is currently no evidence that the virus can be transmitted through food or imported products.

What if my friend or neighbor gets sick?

It makes sense to be concerned, but there is no need for alarm if your friend, neighbor or coworker is sick. Keep appropriate distance, regularly wash your hands and disinfect or avoid touching shared surfaces such as door handles. Avoid sharing food or utensils.

Viruses don't just float freely, and they can't pass through solid surfaces, they are transmitted through close contact, or by touching a contaminated surface then touching your face.

Is coronavirus the same thing as COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that infect people and usually only cause mild respiratory illnesses, such as the common cold. However, some strains of the virus have caused more serious diseases including the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The virus often presents with pneumonia-like symptoms: mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough and difficulty breathing.

COVID-19 is a new disease, caused by a novel (or new) coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans.

Where did it start?

This outbreak originated in Wuhan, China and has been linked to a large seafood and animal market that was reported closed in January for health reasons. Typically, this virus has spread from animals to humans, according to the World Health Organization, but scientists suspect that humans can transmit the disease to other humans.

What role do emergency physicians play?

Emergency physicians have protocols in place to protect the public and are working alongside hospitals and other health professionals to stop the spread of this virus and report relevant cases to local, state and national health departments.

Emergency departments approach potential public health epidemics with the "three I's;"

- Identify the symptoms;
- Isolate the patient in accordance with proper protocol; and
- Inform the appropriate authorities.

Emergency physicians will work with the CDC and others to share information, alerts, and recommendations during any acute disease outbreak.

***Where can I learn more about how emergency departments are preparing?***

As anticipation grows for more widespread community transmission of COVID-19 in the U.S., emergency physicians are on the frontlines caring for those affected. As the national medical society representing emergency medicine, the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) is the preeminent source for clinical, advocacy and emergency patient guidance. ACEP is producing a

series of resources, including the [National Strategic Plan for Emergency Department Management of Outbreaks of COVID-19](#), to keep our health care workers and patients safe. You can visit www.acep.org/COVID19 for ACEP's policy recommendations and the latest clinical guidance for emergency care teams, and www.emergencyphysicians.org/COVID19 for the latest patient information.