COVID-19
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
January 25, 2022

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions:

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease caused by a virus known as SARS-CoV-2. The virus was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China and quickly spread world-wide. It is very contagious and most often causes respiratory symptoms that can feel like a cold, allergies, or the flu.

How does COVID-19 Spread?

COVID-19 spreads when a person infected with the virus breathes out the virus in droplets when coughing, sneezing, talking, or singing. These droplets can be breathed or can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. The virus can also live on surfaces or objects and can be transmitted when a person touches the contaminated objects and then touches their mouth, nose or eyes.

The incubation period, the time it takes for you to develop symptoms after you were exposed, can be between 2 to 14 days after exposure, depending on the variant you have been exposed to.   Some people who are infected may not have any symptoms, so it is important to take precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you have had an exposure.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The main symptoms seen with COVID-19 include:
- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Not everyone has all these symptoms, and people experience a wide range of symptoms with COVID-19. Most people with COVID-19 infections get better, but there are some people who may have post-COVID symptoms or may develop more serious complications. Post-COVID conditions are a wide range of new, returning, or ongoing health problems people can experience more than four weeks after first being infected with COVID-19. Older adults or people who have chronic health conditions may be at risk for developing more serious complications.

How is COVID-19 diagnosed?

SARS-CoV-2 can be suspected in anyone who has symptoms consistent with COVID-19, but a definite diagnosis requires testing. There are two kinds of tests available for COVID-19, one which tests for a current infection (PCR viral tests and antigen tests) and one which tests for a past infection (antibody tests).

PCR viral tests test for a current infection by testing for the presence of the actual COVID-19 virus. In such a test, a sample is taken from the person suspected to be infected, such as a nasal or a very deep nasal swab (i.e. nasopharyngeal), and this is analyzed by a lab to determine if the virus is present. Such tests can take a day to several days to result.

Antigens are structural components of the virus. Antigen tests test for the presence of these structural components, like the spikes on the outside of COVID-19 virus. Antigen tests are typically quicker and less expensive, but they are also less accurate than lab-based PCR tests.

With improvements in both PCR and antigen testing to detect acute infection, antibody testing of blood samples as an indication of past exposure is now discouraged. In rare medical circumstances the test may be ordered, but it is not indicative of immunity to COVID-19 or as a sign of how strong the immune response to past infection was.

Should I be concerned about COVID-19 variants?

Viruses like SARS-CoV-2 can change and mutate like any other virus, resulting in new variants. Some variants may emerge and then disappear and others may spread rapidly and have the potential to cause more serious illness. The CDC and other organizations worldwide will continue to monitor the emergence of new variants.

How do I prevent a COVID-19 infection?

Some things you can do to prevent a COVID-19 infection include the following:

- Get vaccinated: COVID-19 vaccines are safe and are effective at protecting you from getting sick. Make sure you are have received all CDC recommended vaccine doses.
- Wear a mask: Wearing masks, especially indoors, can help reduce the rate of transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The CDC has the most current mask recommendations on who should wear a mask and what type of mask is the most effective.
- Try to keep your distance: Avoid close contact with people and avoid crowds. If possible, maintaining 6 feet between someone who is sick can help prevent you from getting sick.
- Wash your hands: Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after being out in public, before you eat or prepare food, after you blow your nose, cough or sneeze into your

hands, after caring for someone sick, after using the restroom, or after changing a diaper. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

- Cover coughs and sneezes: Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or the inside of your elbow to help prevent the spread of potentially infectious droplets.
- Clean and disinfect: Clean high touch areas such as doorknobs, countertops, tables, handles, phones, toilets, and sinks. If someone in your household has tested positive for COVID-19, make sure to frequently disinfect surfaces with an EPA approved disinfectant.

What should I do if I have symptoms of COVID-19 or test positive for COVID-19?

Regardless of vaccination status, if you think you might have COVID-19, you should:

- Stay home: Most people with COVID-19 recover at home without medical care. It is important to stay home except if you are going to get medical care.
- Contact your healthcare provider: Contact your healthcare provider to inform them of your symptoms and/or positive COVID-19 test. Your healthcare provider may want to see you for a visit or may recommend that you stay hydrated and take OTC medications to help with any symptoms you may be experiencing.
- Get tested: If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should try to get a test including either a home self-test or you can visit a testing location.
- Watch for signs of serious illness: If you experience concerning symptoms including trouble breathing, pain or pressure in the chest, confusion, difficulty staying awake, and changes in the color of your skin, lips or nail beds to pale, gray or blue. If you experience any of these symptoms, call 911 to get immediate medical care.
- Wear a mask: When you are out in public, wear a mask to help prevent the spread of illness.

If I have symptoms of COVID-19 or test positive for COVID-19, when can I be around others?

Regardless of vaccination status, if you have had symptoms of COVID-19, you should:

- Isolate for at least 5 days. Your first day of isolation starts the day after your symptoms began.
- You can end isolation after a full 5 days when:
    - Your symptoms are improving or resolved, and
    - You have not had a fever or used fever reducing medication in the last 24 hours, and
    - You continue to wear a well-fitting mask for an additional 5 days at all times when leaving the home.
    - You should avoid travel, eating out at a restaurant, or going to a gym until a full 10 days have passed since your symptoms began.

Regardless of vaccination status, if you have not had any symptoms of COVID-19 but test positive for COVID-19, you should:

- Isolate for a full 5 days. Your first day of isolation starts the day after you first test positive for COVID-19.
- You can end isolation after a full 5 days after your positive COVID-19 test if:
  - You continue to have no symptoms and when out in public, and
  - You wear a well-fitting mask for at least 10 days since your positive test.
  - You should avoid travel, eating out at a restaurant, or going to a gym until a full 10 days have passed since your positive test.
- If you develop any symptoms of COVID-19, your 5 day isolation period would start over and you should follow recommendations of ending isolation if you have symptoms of COVID-19.

What if I am exposed to someone who is positive for COVID-19?

The CDC defines a concerning exposure to COVID-19 as "close contact" with someone with known or suspected COVID-19 during the contagious period.

The CDC defines "close contact" as:
- You were within 6 feet of someone sick with COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period
- You provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19
- You had direct physical contact with a person (hugged or kissed them) who is sick with COVID-19
- You shared eating or drinking utensils with a person who is sick with COVID-19
- You were sneezed on, coughed on, or somehow got the respiratory droplets of a person sick with COVID-19 on you

The contagious period:
- Begins 2 days prior to the onset of symptoms and ends after their isolation period ends
- Begins 2 days prior to the day a person had a positive COVID-19 test taken and ends 10 days after their isolation period ends

If you have received all [CDC recommended vaccine doses](#) or you have had confirmed COVID-19 infection in the last 90 days AND do not have any symptoms, you do not need to quarantine after an exposure to COVID-19. You should wear a mask when around others and monitor for symptoms for at least 10 days.

If you were exposed to a person with COVID-19, you should take the following precautions:

- Stay home for at least 5 days starting the day after your last close contact to the person with COVID-19. If you do not have symptoms for the 5 days after your last close contact, you can end your quarantine but must continue to wear a well-fitting mask when around others.

- For 10 days after your last close contact, watch for symptoms of COVID-19. If you develop symptoms, you should follow recommendations for if I have symptoms of COVID-19.

- Avoid travel or going to places where you are unable to wear a mask at all times (restaurants, gyms, etc.) for at least 10 days after your last close contact.

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Employers typically have policies regarding when they permit an employee to return to work after quarantine, please refer to your employer's COVID-19 quarantine policy.

Do I need to quarantine after travel?

If you are fully vaccinated, you do not have to quarantine after domestic or international travel unless you have symptoms of COVID-19.

If you have either recovered from a COVID-19 infection or had a positive COVID-19 test within the last 3 months, the CDC does not recommend quarantine or testing unless you have symptoms of COVID-19.

If you are not fully vaccinated, have not recovered from a COVID-19 infection in the last 3 months, or have not had a positive COVID-19 test in the last 3 months, the CDC recommends you do the following:

Before Travel (either domestically or internationally):
- Consider getting tested with a viral test 1-3 days before you travel.
- If your COVID-19 test is positive before or after your travel do not travel and immediately home isolate.

After Travel (either domestically or internationally):
- Get tested 3-5 days after travel AND stay home for 5 days after travel.
  - Even if you test negative, stay home for the full 5 days.
  - If your test is positive, quarantine for 5 days after the test was collected to protect others from getting infected.
- If you don't get tested, stay home for 5 days after travel.
- Avoid being around people who are at increased risk for severe illness for 10 days, whether you get tested or not.
- Always follow state and local recommendations or requirements related to travel.
- If you develop any symptoms during your quarantine, please follow the home isolation instructions for "if you have symptoms of COVID-19."

What if someone in my family gets sick with COVID-19?

If your family member does not need hospitalization and can be cared for at home, you should help them with basic needs and monitor the symptoms while also keeping as much distance as possible. According to the CDC, the sick family member should stay in a separate room and use a separate bathroom, if space allows. If masks are available, both the sick person and the caregiver should wear them when the caregiver enters the room. (Please refer to the CDC website for the most current mask recommendations.) Make sure to follow measures to prevent COVID-19.

Source Materials: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization