



## **COVID-19 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

THIS IS A RAPIDLY CHANGING SITUATION

PLEASE CHECK THE FOLLOWING WEBPAGES FOR UPDATES REGULARLY: [NYSDOH COVID-19](#); [CDC COVID-19](#); [CDC COVID-19 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS](#); AND [JOHNS HOPKINS CORONAVIRUS RESOURCE CENTER](#)

### **GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19**

#### **What is COVID-19?**

SARS-CoV-2, a novel coronavirus, was first identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in 2019. There are many coronaviruses, all of which typically cause respiratory disease in humans. The World Health Organization (WHO) named the disease caused by SARS-CoV2 “COVID-19.” (To eliminate potential for confusion with a different coronavirus, SARS-CoV, these FAQs refer to SARS-CoV-2 as “the virus that causes COVID-19” or “COVID-19”) <sup>i</sup>. In March 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic due to the number of countries affected by its rapid spread.

#### **What is the source of the COVID-19?**

Scientists are currently working on this question. Public health officials and partners are working hard to identify the source of the virus that causes COVID-19. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some causing illness in people such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Other coronaviruses are known to infect animals, including camels, cats and bats. Early on, many COVID-19 cases reported a link to a large seafood and animal market in Wuhan, China, suggesting the virus likely emerged from an animal source. Scientists are currently studying the genes of the viruses to identify its specific source (for more information, see [CDC COVID-19 Transmission](#)).

#### **How many cases of COVID-19 are there?**

On March 11, 2020 WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The number of cases changes on daily basis. The most up-to-date information about the number of COVID-19 cases reported and where these cases are can be found at: [John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center](#); [The Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), and [The World Health Organization](#). For a current COVID-19 case count in NYS, visit [NYSDOH COVID-19 Information](#).



## **What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

COVID-19 can cause mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. Preliminary information suggests older adults and people with underlying health conditions or compromised immune systems may be at higher risk of severe illness from this virus. CDC believes that symptoms of COVID-19 begins between 2 and 14 days after exposure.

## **How does COVID-19 spread?**

While the initial transmission is believed to have been animal-to-person spread, COVID-19 is now spreading from person-to-person. This is thought to occur via respiratory droplets produced when a person infected with the virus coughs or sneezes, the same way flu and other respiratory illnesses spread. The virus that causes COVID-19 can also be transmitted if people touch surfaces and objects with the virus on it.

## **When are people most contagious?**

People with COVID-19 are believed to be most contagious when they are showing symptoms of COVID-19. Some early research shows that individuals with mild COVID-19 might be contagious even before they have symptoms, but it is not clear how common this is.

## **Am I at risk for getting COVID-19 in the United States?**

In the United States, cases have been reported in almost all states, including New York. If you have a question about the situation in another state, please contact their State Health Department directly. Certain people are more at risk of getting COVID-19. These include

- People in communities where ongoing community spread with the virus that causes COVID-19 has been reported.
- Healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID.
- Close contacts of persons with COVID-19.
- Travelers returning from affected international locations where community spread is occurring.

This is a rapidly evolving situation and information is changing quickly.

## **How severe is COVID-19?**

Health experts are still learning about COVID-19. Symptoms range from mild (like a common cold) to severe symptoms that require hospitalization. So far, deaths have been reported mainly in older adults, and those with other serious medical conditions.

## **Who is at highest risk for getting very sick from COVID-19?**

According to limited research, older adults, people who have chronic medical conditions (e.g. heart disease, diabetes and lung disease), and people who are immunosuppressed are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19.

## **Can children get COVID-19?**

According to CDC, children can develop COVID-19 but they tend to have much milder symptoms than older adults. It is not yet known for certain whether or not children with underlying health conditions who develop COVID-19 are at risk for having more severe illness ([CDC COVID-19 and Children](#)).

## **Are pregnant women more at risk for COVID-19?**

Currently, there is not much research on the susceptibility of pregnant women to COVID-19. Pregnant women are more susceptible to viral infections because of immunologic and physiologic changes and may be more susceptible to COVID-19 too. Access this link for more information: [CDC COVID-19 Pregnant Women Guidance](#).

## **Breastfeeding mothers and COVID-19**

It is not currently known if COVID-19 is transmitted from breastfeeding mothers to their children. See [CDC COVID-19 Interim Guidance for Breastfeeding Women](#) for more information.

## **Can COVID-19 be prevented?**

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to prevent exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19. CDC recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of any respiratory viruses

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash can and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Get a flu shot for yourself and your family members. This will not prevent COVID-19 but it will prevent you from getting flu, keeping you healthy and out of the hospital.



## What is community mitigation?

Community mitigation (or non-pharmaceutical interventions) are actions that individuals and communities can take to slow the spread of COVID-19, when there are no pharmaceutical preventive or treatment options. Community mitigation is critically important for protecting individuals most vulnerable to COVID-19 and reducing strain on the health care system. These actions include:

- Social distancing
  - Not shaking hands, hugging or kissing when greeting people
  - Limiting visitors
  - Maintaining at a least six feet apart from others
  - Avoiding mass gatherings
  - Working at home
  - Closing schools and providing remote learning instruction to students
  - For additional information see: [CDC Community Mitigation Strategies](#)

## Can COVID-19 be treated?

There is no specific antiviral treatment recommended for COVID-19 and there is currently no vaccine. People infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 should receive supportive care to help relieve symptoms. For severe cases, treatment in a hospital might be required. Call your healthcare provider to find out more about what care and treatment is available to you.

## Should I wear a face mask to prevent getting COVID-19?

CDC does not recommend that the general public use face masks. Instead, people should cover their coughs and sneezes, stay home when sick, and wash their hands often and thoroughly. However, if you are sick with COVID-19 (or any respiratory illness), you should wear a face mask before going inside a healthcare provider's office or a hospital.

## Should I be concerned about pets or other animals and COVID-19?

While this virus seems to have emerged from an animal source, it is now spreading from person-to-person. While CDC recommends that people traveling to affected countries avoid animals both live and dead, there is no reason to think that any animals or pets in the United States might be a source of infection with COVID-19. More information is available here: [CDC COVID 19 and Animals Guidance.](#)



### **Am I at risk for COVID-19 from a package or products shipping from a country with widespread transmission of COVID-19?**

Currently there is no evidence of COVID-19 transmission associated with imported goods and there have not been any cases of COVID-19 in the United States associated with imported goods.

### **Do I need to stockpile groceries or medications?**

It is important to have a supply of medications and non-perishable groceries on hand in case of local community transmission of COVID-19. If you are concerned about a specific medication, please call your doctor and ask about supply, and ask about how frequently medications can be renewed based on your insurance policy. You can visit [CDC COVID-19 High-Risk-Groups](#) or the [NYSDOH Preparing for COVID-19](#) webpages for more information.

## **COVID-19 IN NEW YORK STATE**

On March 1, 2020, Governor Cuomo announced NYS's first case in a NYC woman who recently traveled to Iran. Since then, many other individuals have tested positive. On March 7, 2020, Governor Cuomo declared a state of emergency in NYS in order to be able to quickly acquire and deploy all available resources to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Please reference the Department of Health's [website](#) for the latest case count and COVID-19 response efforts.

### **COVID-19 Outbreak in Westchester County**

There is ongoing transmission of the virus in Westchester county. Because of movement within the community, and attendance at several large social gatherings, many county residents were exposed to COVID-19 and many are isolated at home. On March 11, 2020, the NYS began a mitigation strategy in Westchester County in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

- As part of this mitigation strategy, all schools, community centers and houses of worship within a one mile radius of the center of the outbreak are closed.

## **COVID-19 TRAVEL RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **What countries have outbreaks of COVID-19?**

Because community transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19 is now occurring globally, WHO has declared COVID-19 a pandemic. CDC has categorized many countries in Europe as warning level 3 (avoid nonessential travel). Because this situation is rapidly changing, other



countries may be added to this list. You can visit CDC's website for the most up to date information at: [CDC Travelers' Health](#).

### **Where should I Avoid Travelling?**

CDC recommends that travelers avoid all non-essential travel to all Level 3 warning countries (this currently includes United Kingdom, Ireland, all countries in Europe, China, Iran and South Korea). CDC also recommends Level 2 warnings for high-risk travelers—older adults and people of any age with serious chronic medical conditions. These individuals should consider postponing **any** nonessential travel. Be aware that these recommendations change frequently and visit [CDC Travelers' Health](#) and [John's Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center](#) for the most current information on the locations and numbers of cases of COVID-19 in the US and the rest of the world for the most current information. Be aware of cancellation policies if you cancel your trip.

## **COVID-19 MOVEMENT AND MONITORING GUIDANCE**

### **What can I expect if I travel from a country that is highly affected by COVID-19 to the US?**

CDC and US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are implementing enhanced health screenings for all travelers entering the United State from countries highly affected by COVID-19. The screening procedures include:

- Travelers fill out a short questionnaire about their travel, any symptoms, and contact information.
- CDC staff take the temperature of each traveler with a hand-held non-contact thermometer (thermometers that do not touch the skin) and observe the traveler for cough or difficulty breathing. If sick travelers are identified, CDC evaluates them further to determine whether they should be taken to a hospital for medical evaluation and to get care as needed.
- If the traveler does not have symptoms, CDC staff will provide health information cards to take with them. The cards tell travelers what symptoms to look out for, and what to do if they develop symptoms within 14 days after leaving a country highly affected by COVID-19. These cards also tell travelers that they need to self-isolate and not go to work or to school for 14 days after leaving a country highly affected by COVID-19 This health assessment is part of a layered approach to limiting the spread of disease and protect the United States from COVID-19 and other diseases.
- All travelers returning from countries with elevated risk levels (3 and 2) should self-isolate for 14 days after leaving that area. These individuals should remain in their homes and apartments, isolate themselves from others in their residence to the extent possible, and not go to work or school. If you have any questions, please call your local



health department. Contact information for each local health department can be found here: [https://health.ny.gov/contact/contact\\_information/](https://health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/).

### **What does quarantine mean?**

In NYS, there are two types of quarantine related to COVID-19.

- 1) 'Mandatory Quarantine' is required and directed by the local health department by a quarantine order. This is required for the following persons:
  - Persons who tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 by a clinical test (regardless if they are symptomatic or not).
  - Persons who had direct contact (within 6 feet) with a confirmed case who tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 (regardless if they are sick or not).
  - Persons who traveled to a highly affected area, and have symptoms of fever, cough, and trouble breathing. NYS considers any county that has a CDC-designated travel warning level of '3' (avoid nonessential travel) and level '2' (practice enhanced precautions) as countries that are highly affected by COVID-19.
  - Any other person whose healthcare provider and local health department believe should be quarantined.
  
- 2) 'Precautionary Quarantine' is required and directed by the local health department. This is required for the following persons
  - Travel to a highly affected area and are not sick. NYS considers any county that has a CDC-designated travel warning level of '3' (avoid nonessential travel) and level '2' (practice enhanced precautions) as countries that are highly affected by COVID-19.
  - 'Proximate exposure' to a confirmed case who tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 in a congregate setting (e.g., within more than 6 feet such as at social gatherings, conferences, etc.), and not sick. If this person develops symptoms of fever cough, and difficulty breathing, they will be placed under Mandatory Quarantine.
  - Any other person whose healthcare provider and local health department believe should be quarantined.

### **What if my child is quarantined and I am not?**

If a child is placed on precautionary or mandatory quarantine for COVID-19 but his or her parents are not, one of the child's parents or guardians is able to self-quarantine themselves with the child. Doing so will ensure that quarantined children are not unnecessarily separated from their caregivers for any length of period.

**What should I do if I was recently in a country with widespread transmission COVID-19 and I now feel sick?**

If you traveled to a country highly affected by COVID-19 in the last 14 days and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, you should:

- Call your local health department: [https://health.ny.gov/contact/contact\\_information/](https://health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/).
- Seek medical care right away. Before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room, it is very important that you call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms (If you do not currently have a doctor, you can find one at a Federally Qualified Health Center: <https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/>).
- Avoid contact with others.
- Do not travel further while sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

**Do children or adults returning from countries with widespread transmission of COVID-19 need to stay at home?**

NYS residents of any age who have recently returned from a CDC Level 3 warning country, or who are considered high risk travelers are required to stay home, not go to work or school, either monitor their health status or have their health status monitored for them, and to practice social distancing from others for 14 days.

**COVID-19 TESTING****Where can NYS residents get tested for the virus that causes COVID-19?**

There are numerous testing sites in NYS for the virus that causes COVID-19. These include 28 public and private labs across the state, the Wadsworth Center, the NYC Public Health Laboratory, and a mobile testing center in New Rochelle. In addition, the state is partnering with BioReference Laboratories to increase the number of tests that can be run daily. Testing for the virus that causes COVID-19 will be completed for individuals meeting NYS COVID-19 risk criteria.

## Can I get tested for COVID-19?

Yes, the NYS Novel Coronavirus Hotline is taking requests for testing for those that meet the criteria below. Please call 1-888-364-3065 for more information.

On March 6<sup>th</sup>, Governor Cuomo announced 5 criteria for testing in NYS:

- Persons that had close contact (within 6 feet) of a known case of COVID-19.
- Persons who have travelled to a country with a CDC-designated level 3 travel health warning for COVID-19 **or** who meet CDC Level 2 high-risk traveler criteria (older adults and people of any age with serious chronic medical conditions) **and** have symptoms of fever, cough, and trouble breathing.
- Persons who are under quarantine as directed by the local health department, and have symptoms of fever, cough, and trouble breathing.
- Persons who are ill with fever AND respiratory illness (e.g., pneumonia, ARDS) and without alternative explanatory diagnosis (e.g., influenza, legionella, streptococcal pneumonia, fungal infections) and patient also has negative results on a molecular respiratory viral panel.
- Persons whose healthcare provider, local health department and NYS Department of Health agree that testing is required (with or without a recent travel history).

The most current information about COVID-19 testing can be found here: [NYSDOH COVID-19 Interim Testing Guidance](#). Also remember that it is cold and flu season and talk to your healthcare provider about testing for other respiratory viruses. If you do not have a doctor – you can find one at a Federally Qualified Health Center: <https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/>.

## What should I do if I have recently traveled to a country highly affected by COVID-19 and have been self-isolating at home and am starting to feel sick?

Please call your local health department or health care provider. Contact information for each local health department is available here :[https://health.ny.gov/contact/contact\\_information/](https://health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/). Your local health department can discuss options and help arrange for testing.

## What should I do if I had contact (within 6 feet) with someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19?

Please call your local health department immediately. They will direct you to stay at home under quarantine for 14 days after your last exposure. They will also ask you if you are feeling sick and will coordinate any testing that may be needed.



### **Is there a commercial test kit for COVID-19 that I can buy at the store to test myself?**

There are no commercially available COVID-19 test kits available for the public to purchase. Clinical testing must be authorized by your doctor or the local health department in the county where you live.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- **NYSDOH COVID-19 Hotline:** For any other questions not covered in these FAQs, call the NYSDOH COVID-19 hotline at (888) 364-3065.
- **LHD Contact Information:** [https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact\\_information/](https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/)
- [NYSDOH: Simple Steps to Stop the Spread of COVID-19](#)
- [NYSDOH COVID-19 Interim Guidance for Cleaning Public and Private Facilities](#)

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