

## 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions (rev 3-24-2020)

**What can I do to protect myself and others from this virus?** Take everyday preventative actions that are always recommended to slow the spread of respiratory illnesses like colds and flu:

- Stay at home as much as possible, and especially if you are sick, to limit your contact with others.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes by using a tissue and then throwing it in the trash. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow. Do not use your hands
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Clean frequently touched surfaces daily (use soap & water or any disinfectant that says "EPA approved" for killing bacteria and viruses)
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Practice social distancing
- Older adults and those at an increased risk for illness should avoid public gatherings.

**What is social distancing?** The best way to slow the spread of COVID-19 is through "social distancing," which means avoiding close contact with others. Social distancing can take many forms, depending on your lifestyle and your family or living situation. Social distancing can include the following habits and steps:

- Avoid handshaking, hugging and other intimate types of greeting
- Avoid non-essential travel (your health care provider may have specific guidance for your situation)
- Avoid crowds, especially in poorly ventilated spaces
- Avoid unnecessary errands — consider ways to have essential items, like food and other household supplies, brought to you through delivery services or through family or social networks

*Note: As a preventive measure to slow COVID-19 outbreaks, Governor Hogan has banned gatherings of more than 10 people, and closed restaurants, bars, movie theaters, and other non-essential businesses. Schools are also closed to avoid social contact with schoolchildren and staff. It is recommended that those at a high risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 stay home as much as possible and contact their healthcare provider.*

**What is the risk to the public right now?** Widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the United States is occurring, and experts expect that in the coming weeks and months, we can expect to see more cases in the U.S. and worldwide. Community spread is how the common cold and flu are transmitted — meaning people catch it from each other while going about their daily lives. Reported community spread of COVID-19 widely in the U.S. raises the level of concern about the immediate threat for the affected communities.

**How can I be more prepared for COVID-19?**

- Have an adequate supply of non-prescription drugs and other health supplies on hand. This could include pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fluid with electrolytes, and vitamins.
- Check your regular prescription drugs to make sure you have an adequate supply; refill your prescriptions if needed.
- Have a thermometer, tissues and hand sanitizer.
- Have a two-week supply of food and drinks available at home.
- Have whatever entertainment you need for an extended stay at home.

**Should I wear a face mask when I go out in public?** Currently, the CDC does not recommend the general public use face masks. Instead, they recommend following everyday preventative actions. such as frequent hand-washing, covering your cough, avoiding close contact with those who appear sick, and seeking medical help if you become ill. A facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms, to protect others from getting infected.

**Can I get tested for COVID-19?** Not everyone needs testing for COVID-19 and testing is reserved for those who are sick, have specific or direct exposure and are under a doctor's care. If you have a fever and are experiencing a cough or shortness of breath, call your health care provider. They will ask you some questions to determine *whether* you need a test at this time. Stay home and avoid close contact with others if you are feeling ill, unless your medical provider tells you to go for a test or come to the office for treatment. If you do not have a health care provider, contact your local health department. Health Departments do not offer testing, but can answer questions or concerns about infection.

**Howard County Health Department**  
**2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions** 3-24-2020

Please see the Howard County Health Department Web Page regarding COVID-19 testing <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments/Health/MM-Alerts-and-Recalls/Coronavirus-Testing>

**Who is at the greatest risk right now?** Currently, the greatest risk of infection is for people who:

- Recently traveled to any geographic area of concern
- Have close, personal contact with those recent travelers
- Have close, personal contact or care for people with COVID-19
- *If infected*, older adults (people over 60) and anyone with a pre-existing medical condition (cancer, diabetes, heart disease, or other condition impacting the ability of the body's immune system to fight germs)

**Do older adults have a higher risk of becoming more seriously ill from COVID-19?** Older adults (age 60+) and those with pre-existing medical conditions have a greater risk for serious illness, and in some cases death, if they become infected with COVID-19. Examples of preexisting medical conditions include: cancer, diabetes, heart disease or other conditions that impact the immune system's ability to fight germs.

If you are an older adult or you have one or more chronic health conditions, you can take action to reduce your risk of exposure to COVID-19:

- Take everyday precautions to keep space between yourself and others
- IF you MUST go out in public, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash your hands often with soap and water or hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol content
- Avoid crowds as much as possible

**What should I do if I think I am sick with COVID-19?** If you become sick with fever, cough or have difficulty breathing, contact your health care provider, especially if you are over 60 years of age or have pre-existing medical conditions.

Follow these steps:

- Call your health care provider, local health department or emergency room **BEFORE** you go and follow their instructions
- Tell them about your symptoms, any recent travel and close contacts (such as people in your household)
- Wear a mask, if one is available

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**Is there a vaccine or medicine I can get for COVID-19?** Not yet, because COVID-19 is a new disease. Experts are at work developing a vaccine, but it must be tested to make certain it is safe and effective. There is also no specific medicine currently available to cure COVID-19. People who have COVID-19 should consult their medical provider for advice on how to help lessen the severity of symptoms. You should call your doctor or the emergency room **BEFORE** you go to the facility.

**If someone has COVID-19, what will happen to them?** The vast majority of people recover from this infection. Many people will have only mild or moderate symptoms. Some people may be advised to recover at home and isolate themselves from others. These individuals should call their healthcare provider if their symptoms get worse.

Some COVID-19 infections can lead to serious illness, and in some cases death. If someone develops a more serious illness from COVID-19, they may be admitted to the hospital. Older patients (over 60) and individuals who have severe underlying medical conditions have a higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 and should contact their healthcare provider early, even if their illness is mild. Examples of pre-existing medical conditions include cancer, diabetes, heart disease, or other conditions effecting the ability of the body's immune system to fight germs.

**If I get the coronavirus, will I then be immune?**

There is still not enough known about whether people who recover from COVID-19 will be immune from future infection from the coronavirus, and if they are, how long that immunity would last.

**Will the Health Department notify me if I was potentially exposed to the virus at my local restaurant or grocery store?**

When notified of a positive test for COVID-19 through laboratory electronic reporting, health department staff seek to contact the person who tested positive as soon as possible to interview them about their recent activities and close contacts. Depending upon their findings, the health department may reach out to those who might have had **close** contact with them to provide information regarding self-isolation and monitoring of symptoms or other steps as appropriate. While positive cases can usually be reached within a few hours, it can more difficult to reach those who are hospitalized.

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There are several reasons why the Howard County Health Department may not reach out in a given instance:

1. Person lives outside of Howard County. HCHD is only notified of positive tests for residents of Howard County.
2. Person is positive but result hasn't come into the electronic system yet. There can be a few-hours lag.
3. Person was tested but specimen has not been processed by lab yet. This can take several days.

In addition, it is not necessary or feasible to notify any and all individuals who may have had indirect, passing or casual contact with an infected individual. Those who become aware of an unspecific or unidentified exposure should follow all the recommended hygiene precautions and monitor themselves for signs of illness.

**Should I cancel travel plans?** Currently, the CDC is warning travelers to avoid all nonessential travel to a growing list of countries. They recommend that all persons defer any travel on cruise ships worldwide, including river cruises, because of the increased risk of COVID-19 transmission onboard ships. They also advise people who are elderly and those with chronic medical conditions to avoid nonessential travel outside the U.S. The State Department has posted an advisory warning against international travel.

For travel within the U.S., some considerations are warranted  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-in-the-us.html>

Visit the CDC travel advisory site to check on current travel warnings if you are planning a trip: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

**Is there anything else I should know?** Health information shared through social media is frequently inaccurate, unless it is from an official, reliable source, such as the Health Department, Maryland Department of Health or the CDC.

You should:

- Stay informed and seek information ONLY from reliable, official sources.
- Be wary of myths, rumors and misinformation circulating online and elsewhere.
- Avoid scams and false claims that offer testing, treatments or cures for COVID-19

## **ABOUT COVID -19**

**What is COVID-19?** COVID-19 is a disease caused by a respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. This is a new virus that hasn't caused illness in humans before. COVID-19 has resulted in hundreds of thousands of human infections, causing illness and in some cases death. Cases have spread to countries throughout the world, with more cases reported daily.

**How does COVID-19 spread?** COVID-19 is spread just like colds or flu through:

- Coughing and sneezing, which creates respiratory droplets
- Close personal contact (within six feet), such as touching or shaking hands
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth

There is now confirmed community spread reported in the U.S., including in Maryland. "Community spread" means people have been infected with the virus in a geographic area, and some are not sure how or where they become infected. Widespread transmission of COVID-19 is occurring in the U.S., and experts expect that in the coming weeks and months, we can expect to see many more cases in the U.S. and worldwide.

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

- Fever
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- In more severe cases, pneumonia (infection in the lungs)

**Who can get COVID-19?** Anyone can contract this virus, regardless of race, age, nationality or religion. This virus has affected people in many countries around the world.