What Is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

At the end of 2019, a new type of coronavirus began making people sick with flu-like symptoms. The illness is called coronavirus disease-19 — COVID-19, for short. The [virus](#) spreads easily and has affected people all over the world.

What Are the Signs & Symptoms of Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

COVID-19 can cause a [fever](#), [cough](#), and trouble breathing. Some people might have:

- symptoms of a [cold](#) such as a [sore throat](#), congestion, or a runny nose
- chills
- muscle pain
- [headache](#)
- a loss of taste or smell
- nausea or vomiting
- [diarrhea](#)
- tiredness

The virus can be more serious in some people. And some people have no symptoms at all.

Some kids are having symptoms caused by [inflammation](#) throughout the body, sometimes several weeks after they were infected with the virus. This is called [multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C)](#). Doctors are trying to find out how these symptoms are related to coronavirus infection.

Symptoms seen in kids have included:

- [fever](#)
- belly pain
- [vomiting](#) or diarrhea
- a rash
- neck pain
- red eyes
- red, cracked lips
- swollen hands or feet

How Does Coronavirus (COVID-19) Spread?

People can catch coronavirus from others who are infected even if they don't have any symptoms. This happens when an infected person breathes, talks, sneezes, or coughs, sending tiny droplets into the air. These can land in the nose, mouth, or eyes of someone nearby, or be breathed in. Some of the tiniest droplets, called aerosols, can linger in the air for minutes to hours and travel on air currents. But it seems that the risk of spread is highest when people are less than 6 feet apart.

People also might get infected if they touch an infected droplet on a surface and then touch their own nose, mouth, or eyes.

Experts are looking at whether the virus can spread through stool (poop).

Is Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dangerous to Children?

Experts are still learning about COVID-19. Far fewer cases have been reported in children. Usually, the virus seems to cause a milder infection in children than in adults or older people.

But in some cases of the inflammatory syndrome called MIS-C, kids developed more serious symptoms, sometimes several weeks after being infected with the virus. Most kids with MIS-C get better after they get special care in the hospital, sometimes in the ICU (intensive care unit).

Call your doctor if your child has symptoms of COVID-19 or MIS-C, or just isn't feeling well. Tell the doctor if your child has been near someone with COVID-19, or lived in or traveled to an area where lots of people have the coronavirus.

Get care right away if your child:
- has trouble breathing
- has severe belly pain
- has pain or pressure in the chest
- is confused or not making sense
- is having trouble staying awake
- looks bluish in the lips or face

These symptoms can be warning signs of serious illness.

How Is Coronavirus (COVID-19) Treated?

Doctors and researchers are working on medicines and a vaccine for coronavirus. Most people with the illness, including children, get better with rest, fluids, and fever-reducing medicine. Some people get very ill and need treatment in the hospital.

How Can I Protect Myself From Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

To protect yourself and your family:

- Avoid large crowds and busy places.

- [Stay at least 6 feet](#) from people you don't live with. COVID-19 can spread before a person has symptoms and even when someone has no symptoms.
- When you go out, adults and kids over 2 years old should [wear a mask](#) or cloth face covering to help slow the spread of the virus. To see how to put on and remove masks, [clean them](#), or make your own cloth mask, check the [CDC's guide](#).
- [Wash your hands](#) well and often. Wash for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Teach your kids to do the same.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.

- Use a household cleaner or wipe to clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that people touch a lot (like doorknobs, cellphones, and counters).

- Keep informed about the spread of coronavirus in your community. You can find this on your local department of health website.

- Follow recommendations from your local health authority, especially if many people have coronavirus in your area.

- Make sure your children have all their [vaccinations](#). Protect them against illnesses like [measles](#) and [the flu](#). Kids who have another infection may have a harder time getting better if they do get COVID-19.

  Experts around the world are studying and tracking COVID-19 and are learning how to keep it from spreading further.

Can Someone Who's Infected Spread Coronavirus (COVID-19) if They Don't Have Symptoms?

The virus spreads most easily when an infected person has symptoms. But it also can spread before symptoms start. It can take 2–14 days after someone is exposed to the virus for symptoms to show up.

The closer you are to someone who is infected with coronavirus, and the longer you're together, the higher your risk of also getting infected.

Who Is at Risk for Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Experts are still learning about COVID-19. There are far fewer cases of the virus reported in children. Usually, the virus causes a milder illness in kids, though some children have become pretty sick.

Most of the people who have died from coronavirus were older adults or people with other health problems, such as heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes.

Who Should Wear a Mask?

[Masks](#) are important for going out, and also help stop the spread of COVID-19 [at home](#). Indoors, anyone who is sick should wear a mask when around others to prevent spreading the virus.

Kids older than 2 years should wear a mask or cloth face covering when in public. Help your kids [get used to masks](#). You can make them together. Practice wearing them so kids feel more comfortable when they wear them or see loved ones wearing them. **Children under 2 years old and people who have trouble breathing should not wear a mask.**

Can Kids Go to School During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic?

Health experts, school officials, and teachers have worked hard to decide whether to [reopen school buildings](#) for in-person learning. To help prevent the spread of coronavirus, some schools limit class sizes, stagger schedules, or offer online learning. Other schools may offer a mix of online and in-person learning. Those schools that have in-person learning generally require kids and teachers to wear masks, maintain [social distancing](#), and take other precautions.

What Should I Do if My Child Has Symptoms of Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Call your doctor if your child has a fever, cough, sore throat, belly pain, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, dizziness, or just doesn't feel well. If your child has

been near someone with coronavirus or lived in or traveled to an area where lots of people have coronavirus, tell the doctor. The doctor can decide whether your child:

- should get tested for the infection
- can be treated at home
- should come in for a visit
- can have a video or telehealth visit

In a telehealth visit, a health care provider can see your child on video while you stay at home. If you can, choose a telehealth provider who specializes in caring for kids. If the doctor thinks your child needs care right away, they will guide you on where to go. When possible, check for telehealth in your area before anyone in your family is sick.

How Are People Tested for Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

There are two types of tests for coronavirus:

- One type of test can tell if someone is currently infected with coronavirus. To do this test, health care providers use a long swab (like a Q-Tip) to take a sample from the nose or throat. They also can test a sample of saliva (spit). Some areas offer drive-thru testing, which lets people stay in their car during the test. At some testing sites, people can swab themselves following directions from the health care team. There also are special kits that families can order to do the test at home.
- A blood test that checks for antibodies can tell if someone was infected with coronavirus at least 2–3 weeks before the test. It can't tell if they're infected at the time of the test, which is why it isn't used to diagnose COVID-19.

Should We Cancel Our Travel Plans Due to Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Recommendations for travel change often. Check the CDC's website for the latest updates. Talk to your doctor, and consider where you live, where you're traveling to, and any medical conditions people in your family have.

Can Pets Get Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Some animals have tested positive for coronavirus. People who are sick shouldn't have contact with their pets. If someone must care for a pet while sick, they should wash their hands before and after contact and wear a face mask. If your pet is sick, call your vet for advice on what to do.

What Does Quarantine Mean?

Quarantine: This is when someone *who might have been exposed to the virus but has no symptoms* needs to stay home. This is because they could be infected and could spread the virus, even though they feel well.

After contact with someone who has COVID-19 (or who tested positive), people need to quarantine if:

- They were within 6 feet of the person for at least 15 minutes over a 24-hour period.
- They care for that person at home.
- They shared dishes, cups, forks, or spoons with the person.
- The person coughed or sneezed on them.
- They touched, kissed, or hugged the person.

People also might need to quarantine if their local health department requires it after travel to an area where coronavirus is spreading rapidly.

What Does Isolation Mean?

Isolation: This is when someone *who is infected with the virus and is contagious* needs to stay home. This helps to prevent spread of the virus to other people.

A person should isolate when:

- They have symptoms of COVID-19.
- They have tested positive for the virus (with or without symptoms).

How Long Should Quarantine or Isolation Last?

Recommendations for how long people should quarantine or isolate change often and can vary depending on where you live. For the latest updates, visit your local health department's website or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website.

In general, a person should:

- **Quarantine** for 14 days (2 weeks) after contact with an infected person or after arriving home from traveling. They should watch for symptoms, which can show up 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus.
  or
- **Isolate** for 10 days from the time their COVID-19 symptoms started, or from the date they tested positive. They can stop isolating 10 days after the start of their symptoms (or their positive test), as long as they've had 1 full day without a fever and their other symptoms have gotten better. If testing is easy to get, a health care provider may choose to send a person for two separate tests at least 24 hours apart. If both are negative, the person can stop isolating.

Someone who starts to feel sick during a 2-week quarantine should switch to isolation and add 10 more days. If they start to feel sick near the end of their quarantine period, it could mean staying at home for as long as 24 days. This can be very hard, but it is very important to do so to prevent spreading the virus to others.

A person in quarantine or isolation should work with their doctor and their local health department to make sure they follow the most current guidelines.