



FAQs About COVID-19

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus which is a family of viruses responsible for the common cold among other things. At various times there have been coronavirus strains which caused more serious illness, and this is one of them.

Is coronavirus COVID-19 is a deadly virus?

- While it initially appeared that COVID had a mortality rate of 2% (2 people per hundred infected) it was only those who were seriously ill who were even tested for coronavirus. The CDC recently revised the rate downward to 1% and expects it to go lower as more cases are discovered through testing. That would be consistent with a severe flu season. For comparison, the 1918 influenza had a mortality rate of 2% and the 2018-2019 flu season mortality rate was 0.1% or moderate.
- Respiratory viruses are dangerous to the elderly and to those with compromised immune systems – people who have underlying medical conditions. All of the people who have died in the US from COVID-19 have had underlying health conditions that made them more susceptible to illnesses.

Is COVID – 19 is highly contagious?

- As a comparison, the seasonal flu “reproduction number” is about 1.3. This means that every person who has the flu infects a little more than one other person. Each person with the coronavirus seems to infect 2.2 other people but that is skewed by the fact that the epidemic in Wuhan was not managed well in the beginning and infections soared. That number will fall as it comes under better control. For other comparisons, COVID is less contagious than chicken pox and far less contagious than measles
- Like colds and flu, people may be contagious before symptoms develop which makes it impossible to completely control spread. Nobody knows how many infected people may have very mild symptoms or even none at all.

How can I keep from getting sick?

- The CDC and Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases both state that the most important thing is –

---- DON'T PANIC ----

There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask.
 - CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.
 - Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for [health workers](#) and [people who are taking care of someone in close settings](#) (at home or in a health care facility).
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

Should I wear a mask?

- If you are not sick you do not need a mask.
- Surgical masks like you see most often are designed to keep droplets from falling in a surgical field and do very little to keep viruses out.
- The N95 masks do keep virus out if properly fitted which is not easy to do. If they are not properly fitted, they are no more effective than surgical masks which is to say not at all.
- The CDC recommends that people STOP buying up masks – they need to be available for healthcare personnel who work with the most ill individuals.

Who is at most risk?

- Like flu and colds, COVID-19 is most dangerous to people older than 65 or those who have chronic physical illnesses or a weak immune system.
- UNLIKE flu, children infected with COVID tend to have mild or no symptoms.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- Symptoms may be mild to severe and may appear 2-14 days after exposure
 - Fever over 100°
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath
- Stay home!
- Keep sick children home
- Chances are that you have the flu or a common cold
- If you need medical advice and have health insurance through Compass Health, call the advice number on our KP membership card or go to <https://healthy.kaiserpermanente.org/washington/get-care> and click on “24/7 advice”.
- Check your insurer webpage if you have other insurance
- Call your PCP office
- DO NOT go to the Emergency Room – you may be exposed or expose someone else who is vulnerable to infection

What else can I do?

- If you have not already been vaccinated for the flu, the CDC recommends that you still get the shot as flu season is ongoing. It will not only keep you well but will save scarce resources for others who may need them.

When will this end?

- We don't know yet. If it follows a typical coronavirus and flu pattern, we will have fewer cases as the weather warms. It may or may not return in the fall with cooler weather as sometimes happens in severe flu seasons.

For excellent local coverage of the virus and how it spreads, please see the Seattle Times article of 3/6/2020 <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/facts-about-novel-coronavirus-and-how-to-prevent-covid-19/>