

# Frequently Asked Questions About COVID-19

## **What is a coronavirus?**

Coronavirus is a type of virus that causes diseases of varying severities, ranging from the common cold to more serious respiratory disease. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a new disease, caused by a new strain of coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans.

## **What do we know about COVID-19?**

There has been an outbreak of COVID-19. While the illness started in China, people with the virus have been confirmed in several countries including the United States.

Since this virus is very new, health authorities are carefully watching the situation and learning more about how this virus spreads. This situation is quickly changing and the U.S. Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) provides updated information as it becomes available.

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

Current symptoms reported for patients with COVID-19 have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

## **What is the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department doing?**

The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department (SBCPHD) is working closely with the California Department of Public Health and the CDC to respond to the outbreak of COVID-19. SBCPHD is communicating with local health care providers on how to safely and effectively evaluate ill people who have been to China. This is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation and CDC provides updated information as it becomes available.

## **What should I do now to protect my family?**

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.

- 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 we avoid going to public events?**

Remember, if you are not feeling well or are experiencing cold, flu or other symptoms, stay home to avoid spreading your germs to others. Take common-sense precautions to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and viruses like colds and flu and stay home to avoid the spread of germs.

### **I am sick. How do I know if its coronavirus or something else, like the flu?**

Call your doctor if you develop symptoms, and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or have recently traveled from an area with [widespread or ongoing community spread of COVID-19](#).

### **Should we cancel our trip?**

CDC provides recommendations on postponing or canceling travel. These are called travel notices and are based on assessment of the potential health risks involved with traveling to a certain area. A list of destinations with travel notices is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

**Warning Level 3:** CDC recommends travelers avoid all nonessential travel to destinations with level 3 travel notices because of the risk of getting COVID-19.

**Alert Level 2:** Because COVID-19 can be more serious in older adults and those with chronic medical conditions, people in these groups should talk to a healthcare provider and consider postponing travel to destinations with level 2 travel notices.

**Watch Level 1:** CDC does not recommend canceling or postponing travel to destinations with level 1 travel notices because the risk of COVID-19 is thought to be low. If you travel, take the following routine precautions:

- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean your hands often by washing them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty.
  - It is especially important to clean hands after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.

Check the CDC website for current recommendations.

### **Should I wear a facemask when I am in the community to protect me from the COVID-19?**

No. The CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. You should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it. A facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms. This is to protect others from the risk of getting infected. The use of facemasks also is crucial for [health workers](#) and other [people who are taking care of someone infected with COVID-19 in close settings](#) (at home or in a health care facility).

### **Am I at risk for COVID-19 from a package or products shipping from China?**

In general, because coronaviruses do not survive long on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks. Coronaviruses are generally

thought to be spread most often by respiratory droplets. Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with imported goods. There have not been any cases of COVID-19 in the United States associated with imported goods.

### **For K-12 Schools and Childcare Program Administrators:**

#### **What actions should school and childcare program administrators take to plan for an outbreak?**

Administrators of childcare programs and K-12 schools should take the following actions to plan and prepare for COVID-19:

- Review, update, and implement school emergency operation plans, particularly for infectious disease outbreaks.
- Emphasize actions for students and staff to take such as staying home when sick; appropriately covering coughs and sneezes; and washing hands often.
- Cleaning frequently touched surfaces.
- Monitor and plan for absenteeism.
  - Review the usual absenteeism patterns at your school among both students and staff.
  - Review attendance and sick leave policies. Encourage students and staff to stay home when sick. Use flexibility, when possible, to allow staff to stay home to care for sick family members.
  - Alert local health officials about increases in absences, particularly those that appear due to respiratory illnesses.
- Monitor and plan for addressing fear and bullying related to COVID-19.
- Communicate early and repeatedly with parents directly what the policies and procedures will be to allow parents to assure proper guardianship and care of children.

#### **What actions can staff and students take to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in my school/childcare program?**

Encourage students and staff to take [everyday preventive actions](#) to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, such as staying home when sick; appropriately covering coughs and sneezes; cleaning frequently touched surfaces; and washing hands often with soap and water. 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. Remember to supervise young children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol, especially in childcare facilities.

#### **What steps should my school take if a student or staff member shows symptoms of COVID-19?**

You should establish procedures to ensure students and staff who become sick at school or who arrive at school sick are sent home as soon as possible. Keep sick students and staff separate from well students and staff until sick students and staff can be sent home.

#### **Should my school screen students for cases of COVID-19?**

Schools and childcare programs are not expected to screen children, students, or staff to identify cases of COVID-19. The majority of respiratory illnesses are not COVID-19. If a community or school has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps.

#### **What environmental cleaning procedures should my school take to keep staff and students healthy?**

Perform routine environmental cleaning. Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, countertops) with cleaners that you typically use. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label. Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (e.g., keyboards, desks, remote controls) can be wiped down by students and staff before each use.

### **COVID-19 and Animals:**

#### **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 in China. There is no reason to think that any animals including pets in the United States might be a source of infection with this new coronavirus. To date, CDC has not received any reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19. At this time, there is no evidence that companion animals including pets can spread COVID-19. However, since animals can spread other diseases to people, it's always a good idea to wash your hands after being around animals. For more information on the many benefits of pet ownership, as well as staying safe and healthy around animals including pets, livestock, and wildlife, visit CDC's [Healthy Pets, Healthy People website](#).

#### **Should I avoid contact with pets or other animals if I am sick with COVID-19?**

You should restrict contact with pets and other animals while you are sick with COVID-19, just like you would around other people. Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus. When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick. If you are sick with COVID-19, avoid contact with your pet, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with pets and wear a facemask.