

# COVID-19

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. HOW DOES COVID-19 SPREAD?

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, can spread from person to person through droplets produced during coughing or breathing during close contact with an infected individual. Infection can also occur indirect contact when these droplets land on objects and surfaces around the infected individual and the other person touches these objects or surfaces, then touches their eyes, nose or mouth. This is why it is important to stay at least 1-2 meters (3-6 feet) away from a person who is sick. Given that some individuals have no symptoms while still infected with the virus, physical distancing of 1-2 meters should be observed regardless of whether the other person seems sick.

### 2. WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and fatigue. Some patients may have loss of taste or smell, conjunctivitis, headache, muscle aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, diarrhea, nausea or vomiting, and different types of skin rashes. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell. Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special management. Approximately 1 out of every 6 people who get COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops symptoms of severe COVID-19, which include difficulty breathing/shortness of breath, confusion, loss of appetite, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, and needs hospitalization. Older people and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes are more likely to develop serious illness. People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

### 3. HOW DO I KNOW IF IT IS COVID-19 OR JUST THE COMMON COLD?

A COVID-19 infection has similar signs and symptoms as the common cold or influenza, and you can only differentiate them through laboratory testing to determine the virus type.

### 4. CAN THE VIRUS THAT CAUSES COVID-19 BE TRANSMITTED THROUGH THE AIR?

Studies to date suggest that the virus that causes COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through respiratory droplets rather than through the air. See previous answer on "How does COVID-19 spread?" Aerosols may be generated during certain medical procedures and other activities, such as singing, but are not considered the predominant route of spread for this infection.

### 5. WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MYSELF AND PREVENT THE SPREAD OF DISEASE?

#### PROTECTION MEASURES FOR EVERYONE

Review the latest information on the COVID-19 pandemic available in the WHO website and through your national and local public health authority. The situation is dynamic so check regularly for the latest news.



You can reduce your chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19 by taking the following precautions:

- Clean your hands regularly and thoroughly with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.
- Maintain at least 1-2-meter (3-6 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. When someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing or sneezing has the disease.
- Follow physical distancing rules of at least 1-2-meter (3-6 feet) distance between yourself and others regardless of whether they are showing symptoms.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, your hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.
- Make sure you and the people around you follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing, then disposing of the used tissue immediately. Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as the common cold, flu and COVID-19.
- Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority. National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.
- Wear a mask for the duration of your illness and while you have symptoms as source control to prevent onward spread of COVID-19 if you are infected.
- Wear a mask as part of the comprehensive public health measures targeted to prevent the spread of COVID-19 even if you do not have symptoms and/or are not infected.
- Keep up to date on the latest COVID-19 hotspots (cities or local areas where COVID-19 is spreading widely). If possible, avoid traveling to those places – especially if you are an older person or have diabetes, heart or lung disease, because you have a higher chance of catching COVID-19 in one of these areas.

## 6. I AM WELL AND ASYMPTOMATIC. SHOULD I USE A MASK?

The WHO advises that masks be used as part of a comprehensive package of control measures to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. Masks alone are not sufficient and should be used together with other practices outlined above. For more information, see the [WHO guidance on mask use in the context of COVID-19](#) (last updated 1 December 2020).

## 7. SHOULD I WEAR A MASK WHILE EXERCISING?

The WHO recommends that masks not be worn during vigorous physical activity. Please ensure a 1-2-meter distance from others when exercising and that there is adequate ventilation.



## 8. HOW LIKELY AM I TO CATCH COVID-19?

The COVID-19 situation continues to evolve globally. To date, all countries and continents have reported cases. Make sure you are aware of the local situation in your country and duty station.

For more information, see <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>

## 9. ARE PREGNANT WOMEN MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE COVID-19 VIRUS AND WILL IT HARM THE FETUS?

The CDC states that, based on current information, it appears that pregnant women are at an increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and death.

## 10. WHAT IS THE RISK OF MY CHILD BECOMING SICK WITH COVID-19?

All age groups, including neonates, can become infected with COVID-19. The same public health measures described in question 5 should be followed with the exception of children 5 years and under who are usually not required to wear masks, unless specific local requires mandate them, in which case they should be supervised.

## 11. ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 DIFFERENT IN CHILDREN THAN IN ADULTS?

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar in children and adults. However, children with confirmed COVID-19 have generally presented with mild symptoms. Although children tend to have a milder disease, critical illness have been reported. A COVID-19 Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) has also been described in children and adolescents.

## 12. SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT COVID-19?

COVID-19 should be taken seriously and vigilance is required. While illness due to COVID-19 infection is generally mild in most infected, it can cause serious illness: about 1 in every 5 people who catch it need hospital care. It is therefore quite normal for people to worry about how the COVID-19 outbreak will affect them and their loved ones.

We can channel our concerns into actions to protect ourselves, our loved ones and our communities. First and foremost among these actions is regular and thorough hand-washing, physical distancing, mask use and good respiratory hygiene. Secondly, keep informed and follow the advice of the local health authorities including any restrictions put in place on travel, movement and gatherings.

## 13. WHO IS AT RISK OF DEVELOPING SEVERE ILLNESS?

Those at most risk of severe illness are those aged 60 and above and those with underlying medical problems such as high blood pressure, heart and lung problems, diabetes, obesity ad cancer.

Although these groups are at highest risk, severe illness and death have been described even in those without these risk factors.



## 14. ARE ANTIBIOTICS EFFECTIVE IN PREVENTING OR TREATING COVID-19?

Antibiotics are used to treat bacterial infections. Since COVID-19 is a virus, antibiotics are not indicated for the direct treatment. However, it may be required in some instances, such as for treating secondary bacterial infections.

## 15. ARE THERE ANY MEDICINES OR THERAPIES THAT CAN PREVENT COVID-19?

There are currently no medicines or therapies that can prevent COVID-19. However, several therapies are being investigated.

## 16. IS THERE A DRUG OR TREATMENT FOR COVID-19?

Currently, most people will recover at home without any specific medications and treatments. For those who are severely ill, optimal supportive care, including oxygen and other respiratory support, may be required. Corticosteroids are indicated for those with severe or critical illness. Remdesivir, hydroxychloroquine, lopinavir/ritonavir and interferon have not been shown to be beneficial.

There are several ongoing clinical trials that include both western and traditional medicines to see if any other medications might be useful for COVID-19.

## 17. IS THERE A VACCINE FOR COVID-19?

Yes, there are vaccines that have been authorized for use against COVID-19. Please see [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/coronavirus\\_vaccinefaq.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/coronavirus_vaccinefaq.pdf) and the WHO website for more information and details on COVID-19 vaccines.

## 18. I AM LOOKING AFTER SOMEONE WHO IS ILL WITH SUSPECT OR CONFIRMED COVID-19. WHAT PRECAUTIONS SHOULD I TAKE?

- You should limit the movement around the house of the individual who is ill and minimize shared space.
- Ensure shared spaces, like bathrooms and the kitchen, are well ventilated. One way to do this is by keeping the windows open. Clean and disinfect the bathroom and toilet surface at least once a day using regular household soap or detergent for cleaning and then disinfecting with a regular household disinfectant containing 0.5% sodium hypochlorite.
- Do not forget the importance of hand hygiene with alcohol-based hand-rub or soap and water (if hands are visibly soiled).
- Whenever possible, household members should stay in a different room or maintain a distance of at least 1-2 meters from the ill person.
- When helping care for the sick individual, wear a tightly fitted medical/surgical mask that covers your nose and mouth when in the same room as the infected individual. Make sure you are careful not to touch your mask. If your mask gets wet or dirty, it should be replaced. When removing a mask, it is important to throw it away and perform hand hygiene. Dispose of any material with respiratory secretions immediately after use.
- Ensure that the individual who is sick is also wearing a mask if tolerated as source control.



- Both the ill individual and you, as the caregiver, should perform hand hygiene after contact with respiratory secretions.
- If you are eligible for COVID-19 vaccination, please proceed with getting vaccinated.

## 19. HOW LONG IS THE INCUBATION AND TRANSMISSION PERIOD FOR COVID-19?

The “incubation period” means the time between catching the virus and beginning to have symptoms of the disease. Most estimates of the incubation period for COVID-19 range from 1-14 days, most commonly around five days. The transmission period refers to the period where you can spread infection to someone else which is currently 48 hours before symptom onset to 14 days after symptom resolution, or date of test in those who were asymptomatic.

## 20. CAN HUMANS BECOME INFECTED WITH COVID-19 FROM AN ANIMAL SOURCE?

Possible animal sources of COVID-19 have not yet been confirmed though are postulated. To protect yourself, such as when visiting live animal markets, avoid direct contact with animals and surfaces in contact with animals. Ensure good food safety practices at all times. Handle raw meat, milk or animal organs with care to avoid contamination of uncooked foods and avoid consuming raw or undercooked animal products.

## 21. HOW LONG DOES THE VIRUS SURVIVE ON SURFACES?

It is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

If you think a surface may be infected, clean it with simple disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others. Cleaning your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or washing them with soap and water is very important. Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

## 22. HOW CAN I GET TESTED FOR COVID-19?

**If you are well, testing is not recommended.** If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, you should immediately isolate yourself from others. Call your local UN clinic/medical facility to inform them of your condition and relevant travel/exposure history. If you have been identified as a close contact of a case by the local Ministry of Health or WHO, please also indicate this. From here you will be advised if a medical assessment is necessary and how to get tested.

## 23. WHAT ALTERNATIVES DO I HAVE IF THERE ARE NO HAND SANITIZERS AVAILABLE? CAN I USE OTHER ALCOHOL LIKE ETHYL OR LIQUOR?

If hand sanitizers are not available, hand washing with soap and water is recommended. Liquor is not effective against coronavirus. For an alcohol-based hand rub to be effective, it must have a minimum alcohol content of 60%.

## 24. CAN PEOPLE WHO RECOVER FROM COVID-19 BE INFECTED AGAIN?

While uncommon to date, there are cases of re-infection with COVID-19 in literature, though they are uncommon.



## **25. IS IT SAFE TO RECEIVE A PACKAGE FROM AN AREA WHERE COVID-19 HAS BEEN REPORTED?**

Yes. The likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low and the risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, travelled, and exposed to different conditions and temperatures is also low.

## **26. IS THERE A CONNECTION BETWEEN COVID -19 AND ENVIRONMENT TEMPERATURE?**

It does not seem likely that temperature changes impact or have any connection with COVID-19. COVID-19 cases have been seen in all seasons and all countries and continents in the world.

## **27. CAN I CATCH THE VIRUS FROM BEING IN AN ENCLOSED SPACE (I.E. BUS, SUBWAY) IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T HAVE RESPIRATORY SYMPTOMS?**

Since the virus is transmitted through respiratory droplets, the risk of catching it from somebody who is asymptomatic, even a contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case, is low. However, in light of the pandemic, everyone should maintain physical distancing, which means keeping at least 1-2 meters away from others, avoiding mass gatherings and areas with large numbers of people, wearing a mask and practicing frequent hand washing and/or hand sanitizing according to the recommendation.

## **28. SHOULD I START AVOIDING PEOPLE OF ASIAN DESCENT AND THEIR BUSINESSES?**

The virus can affect anyone regardless of nationality, race and color. The Organization will not tolerate discrimination and encourages everyone to promote culturally appropriate and empathetic community engagement, detect and rapidly respond to negative public perceptions and counter misinformation.

## **29. WHEN SHOULD WE IDENTIFY OURSELVES AS "BEING SICK" AND STAY AT HOME?**

If you have any COVID-19 symptoms, you should stay home. If you are not sure, then stay home until you have been cleared to come to work by a medical professional.

## **30. MY COLLEAGUE IS SICK BUT HE/SHE INSISTS THAT IT IS JUST THE COMMON COLD AND IS RELUCTANT TO WORK FROM HOME. WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE TO ENFORCE "STAYING AT HOME WHEN NOT WELL" AMONGST STAFF?**

At this time, the SARS-CoV-2 virus is the predominant virus circulating in the world. . Managers should encourage any staff member with cold or flu-like symptoms to arrange for sick leave and stay home until well. Supervisors are also encouraged to exercise flexibility in terms of using remote working arrangements if the staff member would like to limit their contact with others and work from home



### **31. WHAT CAN WE DO IF WE DON'T HAVE ANY HAND SANITIZERS IN THE OFFICE BUILDING?**

You should contact the Facilities Management Service of your local UN duty station, organization or the building administration to procure this.

### **32. DOES THE UN HAVE ANY SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR MEETING / MASS GATHERING ORGANIZERS AND PARTICIPANTS DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK?**

- For meetings during the COVID-19 outbreak, the Division of Healthcare Management and Occupational Safety and Health (DHMOSH) has prepared guidelines for meeting organizers and participants which are available in the UN HR portal. UN offices should use these global guidelines to develop local ones in accordance with host country legislation.
- The WHO has also released an interim guidance with key planning recommendations for mass gatherings in the context of the current COVID-19 outbreak.

### **33. I PLAN TO TRAVEL TO / HAVE A MEETING IN COUNTRIES OR TERRITORIES CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING LOCAL TRANSMISSION OF COVID-19. SHOULD I CANCEL THIS TRAVEL/MEETING?**

For all official travel, UN managers and/or UN personnel undertake a risk assessment to evaluate the criticality of the proposed travel balanced against the risks to the traveller for any travel to or meetings in affected areas experiencing ongoing transmission of COVID-19. This includes risks posed by both medical issues and evolving travel/border restrictions enacted by states parties.

- Please be aware that local authorities may begin to implement travel restrictions and health screening measures for travellers entering or exiting the country. All UN personnel who are planning to travel should check with the destination countries' embassy, consulate, or Ministry of Health and keep up to date with local health advice before and during your travel. You should also comply with any screening measures put in place by local authorities.
- As the outbreak evolves, it can be difficult to predict the situation globally, and it would be prudent to make contingency arrangements should the need arise. Feel free to consult us further at dos-dhmosh-public-health@un.org as needed.

### **34. WHAT IS THE PROTOCOL FOR STAFF MEMBERS RETURNING TO WORK AFTER VISITING COVID-19 AFFECTED COUNTRIES (I.E., THOSE WITH ONGOING TRANSMISSION)?**

- If you have just returned from an affected area, unless superseded by local authorities, a 14-day quarantine is required and you should self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days after travel.
- During that period, you should immediately seek medical attention should you develop any signs and symptoms, such as shortness of breath or cough.
- Remember to share your previous travel history with your health care provider and make every effort to inform them by phone prior to visiting a medical facility and wear a medical mask when you seek medical care.
- You should only return to work when you are well and completely free of symptoms.



- HR personnel and managers are encouraged to exercise flexibility around remote working to support staff.
- Since this is a rapidly evolving situation, many member states are imposing quarantine recommendations for travellers, which varies by country. We suggest monitoring the travel advisories issued from WHO and DHMOSH at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/travel-advice> and <https://hr.un.org/page/travel-health-information> for up to date information.