

COVID-19 FAQs and Prevention Guidance (15 MAR 2020)

Everyone can do their part to help respond to this emerging public health threat. *Each community is unique, and appropriate mitigation strategies will vary based on the level of community transmission, characteristics of the community and their populations.*

This is a rapidly changing situation so it is vital that you keep up with the current news from public health officials.

Am I at risk? As of this time, community spread is now occurring in our area (North Jersey,) but it is low. Community spread means some people have been infected and they didn't travel to an affected area or have direct contact with an infected individual- essentially meaning it is not known how or where they became exposed.

Some people are at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness. This includes: Older adults, with risk increasing by age. People who have serious chronic medical conditions like: Heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease

Can someone spread the virus without being sick? People are thought to be most contagious when they are showing symptoms. Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms; there have been reports of this occurring with this new coronavirus, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads as it is not statistically common at this time.

What about TESTING? Currently, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) criteria dictates the only people who should be tested for COVID-19 are those who have symptoms AND travel history in the past 14 days to specific countries where COVID-19 is widespread (China, Iran, Italy, Japan and South Korea) or symptoms AND close contact with a known confirmed case. We are still in flu season, so the flu needs to be ruled out before getting tested for COVID-19

Although the amount of testing kits has increased, the decision to test someone for COVID-19 is still based on CDC criteria. if you are having symptoms AND you have travel history or exposure to a known confirmed case, call your health provider and notify them before you go into their office, so that they can take proper precautions.

Widespread transmission of COVID-19 could translate into large numbers of people needing medical care at the same time so please do not go to the hospital unless it is necessary.

How about touching surfaces or objects? It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. The virus that causes COVID-19 seems to be spreading easily and sustainably in the community, so it is best to be careful and wash surfaces in your home and wash your hands after touching common surfaces. We do not know how long it lasts on surfaces at this time, but a lot of this determined type of surface and environment. Testing so far with the virus that causes COVID-19 showed that it could potentially last up to 24 hours on cardboard to up to two or three days on plastic and stainless steel.

What about MASKS? CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. It may give you a false sense of security, increase the amount of times you touch your face, and create community anxiety. A facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms when they leave the house to go to a medical appointment. 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 healthcare facility) as long as you have been fit tested.

Most importantly remember to take everyday preventive actions:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, or having been in a public place, and before eating or preparing food.
- If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover your cough and sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve
- Stay home from work if you are sick and try to avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- To the extent possible, avoid touching high-touch surfaces in public places – elevator buttons, door handles, handrails, handshaking with people, etc. Use a tissue or your sleeve to cover your hand or finger if you must touch something.
- Wash your hands after touching surfaces in public places.
- Avoid touching your face, nose, eyes, etc.

- Clean and disinfect your home to remove germs: practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces (for example: tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks & cell phones)
- When you are inside, open windows to bring in more fresh air and enhance filtration
- Pay attention to potential COVID-19 symptoms including, fever, cough, and shortness of breath. If you feel like you are developing symptoms, call your doctor.
- If you develop emergency warning signs for COVID-19 get medical attention immediately. In adults, emergency warning signs include:
 - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
 - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
 - New confusion or inability to arouse
 - Bluish lips or face

To best reduce the risk of increased spread, stay out of crowds, avoid public transportation, stay home if you can and wash your hands!

March 15, 2020- Information provided by Dr. Chasse, Hygeia Public Health, www.hygeiapublichealth.com based on current data from the WHO, NIH-NIAID, and CDC-National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases, and Montgomery County, Maryland Department of Health.