

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Q&A

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COVID-19: How it spreads and how to protect yourself

What is coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

COVID-19 is caused by a new respiratory virus. In December 2019, the virus began circulating in humans. Health experts are concerned because little is known about this new virus and it has the potential to cause severe illness and pneumonia.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms may appear in as few as two days or as long as 14 days after exposure to the virus.

They include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death.

How does COVID-19 spread?

Health experts are still learning about how this new coronavirus spreads. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person:

- Between people who are in close contact (within about six feet) of an ill person.
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- It also may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, then touching their mouth, nose or eyes.

Should I be concerned about getting COVID-19 from products or packages shipping from China or other parts of the world?

In general, coronaviruses are unable to survive on surfaces. There is likely a very low risk of spread from products or packages shipping over a period of days or weeks at ambient temperatures. Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission associated with imported goods.

How can I protect myself from getting COVID-19?

If you are traveling overseas follow the CDC's guidance at [CDC.gov/Travel](https://www.cdc.gov/Travel).

There are steps you can take to prevent spread of flu and the common cold that will also help prevent COVID-19, including:

- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or upper sleeve when coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home if you are sick and contact your healthcare provider.

Right now, there are no additional precautions recommended for the general public in the United States.

It is important to remember that stigma and discrimination occur when people associate an infectious disease, such as COVID-19, with a population or nationality. COVID-19 does not target people from specific populations, ethnicities, or racial backgrounds.

Should I wear a mask to protect myself from getting COVID-19?

No. Facemasks are not recommended for healthy people. Facemasks should be used by:

- [Healthcare workers](#)
- [People taking care of someone with COVID-19](#)

If you are sick with respiratory illness and visit a healthcare provider, you may be asked to wear facemask during your visit.

Should I be concerned about my pets or other animals and COVID-19?

To date, CDC has not received any reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19. 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 with soap after being around animals.

Monitoring, isolation and quarantine measures

How many people in Michigan have been diagnosed with COVID-19?

Updated results are available at Michigan.gov/Coronavirus.

Why doesn't the state provide more details about the location and hospital of patients who test positive or are being treated?

The HIPAA Privacy Rule protects the privacy of patients' health information but also allows for some disclosures of information when necessary to protect the state's public health from immediate threats.

In an emergency situation, reasonable safeguards must remain in place to protect certain patient information against intentional or unintentional prohibited use. In most cases, reasonable efforts must be made to limit the information disclosed to that which is the minimum necessary to prevent the spread of a disease like COVID-19.

That often includes providing general information on patient's county or age, while not disclosing their exact location. Providing the minimum necessary information is also important for the overall safety and security of the patient, while protecting others' health.

What does it mean if someone is being monitored for COVID-19?

Public health monitors the health of people who could have been exposed to the virus.

MDHHS is receiving daily referrals about travelers from the CDC airport quarantine stations. Once MDHHS receives the referral, the information is provided to the local health department in the jurisdiction where the traveler resides. Local health department staff contact the individual, assess their risk and supervise daily for health monitoring (temperature, cough, difficulty breathing) for 14 days after their last day of exposure..

Has anyone been quarantined?

To date, no one has been placed in a quarantine facility in Michigan because the screening process has not identified any individuals as being at "high risk" of infection. Some individuals have been asked to self-quarantine in their own homes based on their risk of exposure.

Where is or are the quarantine facilities?

At this time, we are not releasing the locations of quarantine facilities due to individual privacy.

Why is it important to have quarantine and isolation measures for the COVID-19 outbreak?

- The COVID-19 outbreak has caused very severe illness in some individuals.
- There is no approved vaccine or medication to treat COVID-19 patients.
- Isolation and quarantine efforts seem to have reduced new COVID-19 transmission in other countries.

Testing for COVID-19

What determines if someone is tested for COVID-19?

Testing is dependent on the current status of COVID-19 in local communities, as well as the course of illness. Clinicians should work with the local health department to determine if testing is warranted.

Criteria may change as we understand more about COVID-19.

How can I get tested for COVID-19.

Individuals who are concerned about their health and experiencing respiratory illness or other concerning symptoms, should contact their healthcare provider to discuss their symptoms.

Healthcare providers make decisions about testing based on signs and symptoms of respiratory illness and potential exposure. They also try to rule out other causes for respiratory illness.

- If your healthcare provider decides it is necessary to test for COVID-19, they will take the sample and order testing. You will receive your results from your healthcare provider.
- If your healthcare provider decides it is not necessary to test for COVID-19, and you do not agree, you could consider getting a second opinion.
- If your healthcare provider does not offer COVID-19 testing, and you are concerned about your health, you should contact a different healthcare provider.

Testing at the Bureau of Laboratories (BOL) is prioritized for high-risk individuals and those that may pose a risk to the public. Commercial laboratories can also perform COVID-19 testing.

Do health workers know how to take samples correctly from patients?

Sample collection for COVID-19 is similar to procedures that hospitals and healthcare workers follow for respiratory viruses. MDHHS Bureau of Laboratories (BOL) have developed kits and guidance to ensure proper collection and shipping of samples.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in Michigan.

[Executive Orders and Directives](#)

[Community Mitigation Strategies](#)

What has Michigan done to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Michigan?

MDHHS began working with local health departments, healthcare coalitions, hospital and healthcare partners when the novel coronavirus outbreak began in Wuhan, China. Initial focus was working with federal partners to ensure that Michigan's public health system could support traveler screening and monitoring to limit the entry of cases into the U.S.

Hospitals and healthcare partners were also engaged to establish screening procedures for any patients presenting for care with a travel history and symptoms that could be indicative of a possible COVID-19 case. These activities have mirrored much of the public health response to recent Ebola outbreaks.

While MDHHS was implementing those activities, there has been considerable effort put into planning for the next phase of this outbreak which would include community mitigation.

- On Feb. 3, MDHHS activated the Community Health Emergency Coordination Center to coordinate with local health departments.
- On Feb. 28, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer activated the State Emergency Operations Center to help coordinate the state's response.
- On March 3, Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced the creation of four task forces to combat the spread of coronavirus and assess the impact it may have on Michiganders' day-to-day lives. These task forces include: State Operations, Health and Human Services, Education, and Economy/Workforce.
- On March 10, the State Emergency Operations Center Joint Information Center was activated to assist with the public information effort
- On March 10, Governor Gretchen Whitmer declared a state of emergency to slow the spread of COVID-19.

What is a state of emergency? Does it indicate the severity of a situation?

A state of emergency declaration is simply a way to free up resources. It is a temporary order that allows the governor to assist communities in need better and faster by making resources immediately available. It also makes it easier for the state to seek federal assistance during and after a natural disaster, pandemic and more.

What is community mitigation?

Community mitigation activities are routinely utilized on a small scale by public health when responding to outbreaks. This may be a public health response to a chicken pox outbreak in a school or school district, or visitor restrictions in hospitals during flu season. Community mitigation uses a variety of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to limit the spread of the virus.

Personal NPIs are everyday preventive actions, such as staying home when you're sick, covering coughs and sneezes and washing your hands. These actions can help keep yourself and others from getting and spreading respiratory illnesses like the flu.

Community NPIs are policies and strategies such as school closures and dismissals, postponing social gatherings and social distancing (telecommuting). Organizations and communities can put these strategies into place to help slow the spread of illness during an infectious disease outbreak.

Environmental NPIs include routine surface cleaning that helps to eliminate the virus from frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as toys, refrigerator handles, desks, and doorknobs in homes, childcare facilities, schools, workplaces, and other settings where people regularly gather.

In weekly, routine calls with local health departments and healthcare partners, MDHHS has been working to transition our preparedness and response toward community mitigation. MDHHS staff and administration will continue to work with our state partners to implement community mitigation strategies in response to the COVID-19 outbreak as needed. This is a similar approach as was taken in 2009 in response to the Pandemic Influenza H1N1.

[For events and event planners](#)

I am planning or attending a conference or event, do I have to cancel it?

Governor Whitmer's executive order requires cancellation of mass gatherings of 250 people or more in an enclosed space, like a room or a theatre. This limit applies to each room within a facility.

MDHHS recommends cancellation, postponement, or modifications to conferences and events with 100 or more attendees. Smaller events should also consider cancellation and other social distancing strategies. High-risk communities should cancel gatherings of more than 10 people.

[For schools and students](#)

Should I be concerned about my student returning to college after spring break?

Students who traveled during spring break should contact their university's travel office. Many universities have restricted travel to certain parts of the world. This means your student might be asked to remain off campus until 14 days after they returned to the U.S. and are symptom free.

Are schools preparing for community spread in Michigan?

MDHHS and Michigan Department of Education (MDE) [issued recommendations](#) for public and nonpublic schools and libraries. School districts were asked to review considerations including:

- Reporting influenza-like activity, absenteeism, and potential school dismissals.
- Educating students, staff, and the community about COVID-19 and how to prevent spread.
- Reviewing current dismissal policies, including employment stipulations for staff.
- Planning for impact to meal programs if school day, sport, or gathering cancelations are necessary.
- Coordinating with local health departments on decisions to exclude a student or staff member, or to close schools altogether.

For businesses and consumers

If schools are closed and large events are prohibited, why are so many businesses and offices open?

Governor Whitmer's executive order places limitations on the number of people that can be in an enclosed area.

- Many businesses are taking extra precautions, such as providing hand sanitizer at entryways or cleaning more frequently, to protect their customers. If you are concerned, you could call the business ahead of time and ask what precautions are in place before deciding if you should go.
- Medical offices, like dentist offices, have infection control procedures to protect their patients. If you are concerned, you could call the office ahead of time and ask about their procedures. If you are still concerned, you could reschedule or reach out to another provider.

Does the virus live on currency notes and coins? Should businesses stop accepting them?

We know that COVID-19 can live on surfaces. The length of time the virus lives on a surface depends on the type of surface (e.g., hard, porous). It is not known how long, or even if, the virus lives on currency, but everyone should always practice good hygiene when handling money. Money handlers should be sure to wash their hands frequently and avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth.

What actions should businesses take to prepare for community spread of COVID-19?

Employers should [consider strategies](#) to prevent spread of illness in the workplace including:

- Encouraging sick employees to stay home and ensuring that policies are consistent with public health guidance.
- Separating employees with acute respiratory illness.
- Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces.
- Provide information to employees before traveling.

COVID-19 healthcare preparedness

Does Michigan have a system in place to warn of a potential outbreak early on?

Michigan has a surveillance system to detect cases and clusters associated with an infectious disease outbreak as reported by healthcare providers, emergency departments and local health departments. Also, emergency medical service (EMS) agencies are working closely with MDHHS to report and investigate clusters of respiratory illness requiring EMS transfers to hospitals. These systems are reviewed daily to warn of potential outbreaks of illness, including COVID-19.

Is Michigan's healthcare system ready to treat patients with severe or critical disease?

Currently, there are no therapeutics to treat COVID-19, only supportive care. Healthcare providers are prepared to provide supportive care to COVID-19 patients. MDHHS provides updates to healthcare providers to ensure they are equipped with the most current guidance. MDHHS maintains a cache of vital medical equipment that can be deployed to healthcare organizations if necessary.

Do healthcare workers have the necessary training and equipment to keep them safe?

MDHHS provided guidelines and recommendations for safety measures, including the proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), to healthcare providers, facilities, and EMS agencies. MDHHS is working to obtain additional supplies, including PPE for healthcare workers, to support an outbreak response and healthcare operations in Michigan.

COVID-19 Information Updates:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [CDC.gov/Coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services: [Michigan.gov/Coronavirus](https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus)