

Get the Facts: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

Coronavirus Disease 2019, or COVID-19, is a respiratory disease that can spread from person to person, primarily in the same way colds and influenza are spread: by droplets from coughs and sneezes. It is caused by a new strain of a virus that was first detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and now has spread to dozens of countries around the world, including the United States. The first case in the Chicago area was diagnosed in late January 2020. Our goal as a city is to reduce the impact of COVID-19 in Chicago by detecting new cases quickly, minimizing the spread of disease, and developing guidance to prepare communities to respond.

What is the health risk from COVID-19 in Chicago?

The immediate health risk to the general public from COVID-19 in Chicago remains low at this time. There is no need at this point for people in Chicago to wear masks or cancel events, for example. As more testing is happening for COVID-19, we expect to continue to identify additional cases both in the U.S. and here in the Chicago area. But at this time, the general public remains unlikely to be exposed to this virus. CDPH is monitoring the situation carefully, with CDC, and will rapidly communicate any changes in this guidance.

Nationally, people in communities with **ongoing community spread** are at elevated though still relatively low risk of exposure. Healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19, close contacts of persons with COVID-19, and travelers returning from affected [international locations](#) where community spread is occurring also are at elevated risk of exposure.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms can include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. In confirmed COVID-19 cases, illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death. Most cases of COVID-19 result in mild illness. To date, children also seem less likely to become ill. But people who are older and who have other health conditions are more likely to have serious illness. CDC reports that symptoms of COVID-19 may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure.

How does the virus spread?

Although the virus that causes COVID-19 probably emerged from an animal source, it is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).

What is the treatment for COVID-19?

There is no specific medicine to treat COVID-19 at this time, though studies are underway. People with COVID-19 should receive supportive care from a health care professional. Supportive care means care to help relieve symptoms; for example, medicine to bring down fevers, or oxygen if a patient's oxygen level is low.

Is there a vaccine?

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. Development is underway but will likely take a year or more. The best way to prevent infection and transmission is to practice everyday preventative actions such as washing your hands often and staying home when sick.

How can I protect myself from COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases?

As with any respiratory virus, you can protect yourself and others by taking everyday common sense actions:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- 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. At this time, no special sanitizing processes beyond routine cleaning are necessary or recommended to slow the spread of respiratory illness.

Remember that it's also flu and respiratory disease season and CDPH recommends getting a flu vaccine, taking everyday preventive actions to help stop the spread of germs, and taking flu antivirals if prescribed. See www.chicago.gov/flu.

What are CDPH's recommendations for using a face mask?

CDPH **does not recommend** that people who are well wear a face mask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. Face masks can be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of face masks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone with suspected COVID-19 in close settings.

What can travelers do to protect themselves and others?

CDPH strongly recommends avoiding travel to countries with **level 3 travel notices**, including layovers at airports, because there is widespread sustained transmission of COVID-19 in these countries and the risk of acquiring the virus is high. Older adults and those with chronic medical conditions should also consider postponing travel to destinations with **level 2 travel notices**. The latest travel notices are available on CDC's [COVID-19 web page for travelers](#).

What if I recently traveled to an area affected by COVID-19?

Travelers returning from any country with a [Travel Alert Level 3](#) should stay home and monitor their health for 14 days after leaving the country with the travel alert. Please follow instructions during this time. Your cooperation is integral to the ongoing public health response to try to slow the spread of this virus.

- Do not go to school or work. Absences for this purpose should be excused and alternate arrangements should be made for teleworking or online school assignments if possible.
- Take your temperature with a thermometer 2 times a day and watch your health.
- If you develop a fever (100.4F/38C) or cough, seek medical care right away. Call ahead before going to a doctor's office or emergency room. Tell them your symptoms and that you were in an affected area. You can also call CDPH at **312-746-7425 (SICK)** during business hours. After hours call **311** and request to speak to the Medical Director on call. In the case of a medical emergency, call 911.

Travelers returning from any country with a [Travel Alert Level 2](#) should monitor their health for 14 days but do not need to limit their movement or activity. If you develop COVID-19 symptoms, contact your healthcare provider, and tell them about your symptoms and your recent travel to an area with community spread of COVID-19.

For local updates, visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus. For national updates, visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus. If you have other questions, email coronavirus@chicago.gov or call 312-746-4835.

This version was released on 03/04/2020. It may be updated with new guidance. Please visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus to find the latest version.