



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) FAQ for 2-1-1 Call Script

Disease Basics

Q: What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

A: The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a new respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China.

Q: What is a novel coronavirus?

A: There are a few known coronaviruses that cause mild illness in humans. A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness.

Q: What is the source of COVID-19?

A: Public health officials and partners are working hard to identify the source of the COVID-19. Coronaviruses are among a large family of viruses, some causing illness in people and others that circulate among animals, including camels, cats, and bats. SARS, another coronavirus that emerged to infect people, came from civet cats, while MERS, another coronavirus that emerged to infect people, came from camels. The recently emerged COVID-19 is not the same as the coronavirus that causes Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) or the coronavirus that causes Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Q: How does the virus spread?

A: Most often, spread from person-to-person happens among close contacts (about six feet). Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. This virus probably originally emerged from an animal source but is now spreading from person to person. It's important to note that how easily a virus spreads person-to-person can vary. Some viruses are highly contagious (like measles), while other viruses are less so. Investigations regarding this novel coronavirus are ongoing.

Q: Can the COVID-19 virus spread through drinking water?

A: The COVID-19 virus has not been detected in drinking water. Conventional water treatment methods that use filtration and disinfection, such as those in most municipal drinking water systems, should remove or inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19.

Prevention

Q: How can I help protect myself and others?

A: There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 infection. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- 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, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Stay home when you are sick
- CDC Facemask recommendations:
 - CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory viruses, including COVID-19.
 - Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of Coronavirus Disease 2019, to protect others from the risk of getting infected.
 - The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone in a close setting (at home or in a health care facility).

Q: What should I do if I had close contact with someone who has COVID-19?

A: If you have had close contact with someone who has COVID-19, call your healthcare provider immediately and describe the contact you have had.

Medical Information

Q: What are the symptoms and complications that COVID-19 can cause?

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

Q: Should I be tested for COVID-19?

A: If you develop symptoms such as fever, cough, and/or difficulty breathing, and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or have recently traveled from an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19, stay home and call your healthcare provider. Older patients and individuals who have severe underlying medical conditions or are immunocompromised should contact their healthcare provider early, even if their illness is mild. If you have severe symptoms, such as persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or inability to arouse, or bluish lips or face, contact your healthcare provider or emergency room and seek care immediately. Your doctor will determine if you have signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and whether you should be tested.

Q How do you test a person for COVID-19?

A: At this time, testing samples for COVID-19 that are intended for testing at public health labs can be obtained by local healthcare professionals from persons suspected of having coronavirus. Healthcare professionals should work closely with their local or regional health department to receive approval for public health testing. New commercial testing is now available as well. Persons interested in commercial lab testing should contact their provider to inquire about testing.

Q Can a person test negative and later test positive for COVID-19?

A: Using the CDC-developed diagnostic test, a negative result means that the virus that causes COVID-19 was not found in the person's sample at that point in time. In the early stages of infection, it is possible the virus will not be detected.

For COVID-19, a negative test result for a sample collected while a person has symptoms likely means that the COVID-19 virus is not causing their current illness.

Q: What should I do if I am a medical provider and I have a sample from a patient?

A: Healthcare providers should contact their local health department, or regional health department (in the absence of a local health authority), to report the sample and receive guidance and approval to package and ship the sample to a laboratory. To contact your local health department, you can visit the [Local Health Entities page on the DSHS website: dshs.texas.gov/regions/2019-nCoV-Local-Health-Entities](https://dshs.texas.gov/regions/2019-nCoV-Local-Health-Entities).

Please visit dshs.state.tx.us/lab for interim guidance for handling and shipping samples under the **COVID-19 Specimen Collection and Submission Instructions** link.

Q: Is there lab testing in Texas?

There are public health labs as well as commercial/private labs that are processing test samples in Texas. If you are ill and think you may need testing for COVID-19, you should call your physician.

Q: Where can I find guidance documents?

A: All medical guidance can be found on the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) website at dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus. DSHS will make continuous updates as they receive guidance from the CDC.

Schools and Institutions of Higher Education

Q. Does the CDC have an algorithm or other guidance to assist schools on school closure decisions?

A: As of now Texas schools should follow the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) guidance on school closures. For further guidance from the DSHS please visit: dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/other.aspx.

Q: How can Colleges and Universities better protect their student population?

A: Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) should plan and prepare their students and faculty to prevent spread of COVID-19. Along with overall preventative measures, please refer to the interim guidance on the CDC website cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-ihe-response.html.

Public Health Response and Current Situation

Q: What is DSHS doing about COVID-19?

A: This is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation, and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) will continue to provide updated information as it becomes available. DSHS is working 24/7 to protect people's health.

Q: Has anyone been infected in the United States?

A: Yes. To stay up to date on COVID-19 activity in the United States, go to cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV. For the latest information on cases in Texas, go to DSHS Coronavirus website at dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus.

Q: Am I at risk for novel coronavirus from a package or product shipping from China?

A: There is still a lot that is unknown about the newly emerged Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and how it spreads. Two other coronaviruses have emerged previously to cause severe illness in people (MERS and SARS). COVID-19 is more genetically related to SARS than MERS, but both are betacoronaviruses with their origins in bats. While we don't know for sure that this virus will behave the same way as SARS and MERS, we can use the information from both of these earlier coronaviruses to guide us. In general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely a very low risk of spread from products or packaging shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient temperatures.

Travel

Q: Should I cancel my international travel because of COVID-19?

A: The CDC has an evolving list of countries with specific travel notices and recommendations. For the most up-to-date list of travel restrictions and other information for travelers regarding COVID-19, please visit cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers. For additional travel information, visit the Destination Page or Travel Health Notices on cdc.gov and locate the country you are planning travel to.

Q: How are travelers from China being screened when they enter the United States?

A: At this time, American citizens, lawful permanent residents, and family members who have been in China in the past 14 days will be allowed to enter the United States. Those travelers will be directed to one of 11 U.S. airports and will undergo a health screening and asked questions about their travel in

China. Foreign nationals (citizens from other countries) who have traveled to China in the past 14 days, are currently not being allowed into the United States.

Q: What if I recently traveled to an area affected by COVID-19 and got sick?

A: If you were in a country with a COVID-19 outbreak and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, within 14 days after you left, you should:

- Seek medical advice. Call ahead before you go to a doctor's office, clinic or emergency room. Tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Contact your local health department to notify them of your travels and if you are experiencing symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Do not travel on public transportation while sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds to avoid spreading the virus to others.
- If soap and water are not readily available, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol.
- Disinfect any frequently touched surfaces and objects with household cleaning spray or wipe.

Q: After returning from China, when can employees return to work?

A: Currently, anyone who enters the United States after being in China during the past 14 days will have some level of restrictions on their movements.

- Travelers from Hubei Province will be quarantined and actively monitored in a location to be determined by public health authorities for up to 14 days.
- Travelers from other parts of China who do not have any symptoms are being asked to monitor their health and practice "social distancing" for 14 days.

Social distancing means remaining out of:

- Public places where close contact with others may occur (such as shopping centers, movie theaters, stadiums).
- Workplaces (unless the person works in an office space that allows distancing from others).
- Schools and other classroom settings.

- Local public transportation (such as on a bus, subway, taxi, ride share, plane, ship)
- These restrictions are to be in effect for 14 days from the time the person was possibly exposed.

For more information: See Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html).

Q: Should businesses recommend facemasks or other protective equipment during travel?

A: CDC does not recommend travelers wear facemasks to protect themselves from COVID-19. You may choose to wear a mask, but it is more important that you follow everyday prevention practices:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning product.
- 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 that contains 60%–95% alcohol.

Q: Is it safe to go on a cruise?

A: Cruises put large numbers of people, often from countries around the world, in frequent and close contact with each other. This can promote the spread of respiratory viruses, such as the virus that causes COVID-19. You may get sick from close contact with an infected person or by touching contaminated surfaces.

- To reduce spread of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, CDC recommends that crew members and passengers:
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - 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 that contains 60%–95% alcohol.
- Stay in your cabin when you are sick and let the onboard medical center know immediately if you develop a fever (100.4°F/38°C or higher), begin to feel feverish, or have other symptoms (such as cough, runny nose, shortness of breath, or sore throat).

COVID-19 and Animals

Q: What about animals or animal products imported from China?

A: At this time, CDC does not have any evidence to suggest that animals or animal products imported from China pose a risk for spreading COVID-19 in the United States.

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

A: While this virus seems to have emerged from an animal source, it is now spreading from person to person. CDC recommends that people traveling to China avoid animals both live and dead, but there is no reason to think that any animals or pets in the United States might be a source of infection with this new coronavirus.

Q: Should I avoid contact with pets or other animals if I am sick?

A: Do not handle pets or other animals while sick. Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, several types of coronaviruses can cause illness in animals and spread between animals and people. Until we know more, avoid contact with animals and wear a facemask if you must be around animals or care for a pet. Source of information: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

For further information and guidance, please visit
dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus

For public health and medical questions, please email
coronavirus@dshs.texas.gov