

Testing, treatment and risks

Is there a test to diagnose COVID-19?

Yes. If your doctor or nurse suspects you have COVID-19, they might take a swab from inside your nose or mouth for testing. Depending on the lab and the type of test performed, it can take up to several days to get test results back.

The tests used to diagnose COVID-19 are either "nucleic acid tests" or "antigen tests." Nucleic acid tests, also called "molecular" tests or "PCR" tests, look for the genetic material from the virus. Antigen tests look for proteins from the virus. Antigen tests can give results faster than most nucleic acid tests. But they are not as accurate as nucleic acid tests. Nucleic acid tests often remain positive for several weeks or months after the test is initially positive; repeat testing is often not advised unless you are having symptoms of COVID-19 or at the direction of your health care provider.

There is also a blood test that can show if a person has had COVID-19 in the past. This is called an "antibody" test. Antibody tests are generally not used on their own to diagnose COVID-19 or make decisions about care.

Testing is based on many things like your signs and symptoms, exposures, having been at a large gathering and/or recent travel. Your doctor or health care team will decide whether to test and which test is the right test for you.

What if I test negative, but still have symptoms?

You should stay home from work or school. Wear a mask and keep distance from others if you must leave home.

How is COVID-19 treated?

Many people will be able to stay home while they get better. But people with serious symptoms or other health problems might need to go to the hospital.

- **Mild illness** – Mild illness means you might have symptoms like fever and cough, but you do not have trouble breathing. Most people with COVID-19 have mild illness and can rest at home until they get better. This usually takes about 2 weeks, but it's not the same for everyone.
- **Severe illness** – If you have more severe illness with trouble breathing, you might need to stay in the hospital, possibly in the intensive care unit (also called the "ICU"). The doctors and nurses can monitor and support your breathing and other body functions and make you as comfortable as possible. You might need extra oxygen to help you breathe easily.

Doctors are studying several possible treatments for COVID-19. In certain cases, doctors might recommend medicines that seem to help some people who are severely ill or at risk of getting severely ill. Talk to your doctor or health care team about the currently available treatment options for COVID-19, and what might be appropriate for you.

During your hospital stay, the health care team will take special precautions to help prevent the spread of infection. This means they will wear eye protection, masks, gowns, and gloves while they care for you. These precautions will be maintained until you are considered no longer contagious. In some situations, if the hospital is very busy, you may be placed in a room with another patient. This is done with the

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

guidance of the hospital's Infection Prevention Department, and it is considered safe for both you and the other patient.

How long am I considered contagious to others?

If you are recovering from COVID-19, it's important to stay home and "self-isolate" until your doctor or nurse tells you it's safe to stop. Self-isolation means staying apart from other people, even the people you live with. When you can stop self-isolation will depend on how long it has been since you had symptoms – usually people remain contagious beginning about 2 days before symptoms begin until about 10 days after symptom onset. This contagiousness period can be slightly longer in people with severe illness or compromised immune systems.

If you are hospitalized with COVID-19, visitors are not routinely allowed to visit during the period of contagiousness. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or health care team about options for connecting with your family, friends, and loved ones during your hospital stay.

Am I at risk for serious illness or complications from COVID-19?

It depends on your age and health. In some people, COVID-19 leads to serious problems like pneumonia, not getting enough oxygen, heart problems, or even death. This risk gets higher as people get older. It is also higher in people who have other health problems like serious heart disease, chronic kidney disease, type 2 diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), sickle cell disease, or obesity. People who have a weakened immune system for other reasons (for example, persons on chemotherapy or certain organ transplant recipients), may also be at higher risk for complications.

Exposure

What if I feel fine but think I was exposed?

If you think you were in close contact with someone with COVID-19, what to do next depends on whether you have already had COVID-19 or gotten the vaccine:

- **If you have not had COVID-19 or have NOT received the vaccine** – You may wish to get tested approximately 3 to 5 days after a possible exposure, even if you don't have any symptoms. Then self-quarantine at home and monitor yourself for symptoms for up to 14 days. This means staying home as much as possible, and staying at least 6 feet (2 meters) away from other people in your home.
- **If you have had COVID-19 or have received the vaccine** – If you had COVID-19 within the last 3 months, you do not need to self-quarantine. If you had COVID-19 but it was more than 3 months ago, follow the steps above. If you are fully vaccinated, you do not need to self-quarantine. But you could get tested 3 to 5 days after you were in contact with the person who had COVID-19. Even though you are much less likely to get the infection after being vaccinated, it is still possible.

If you self-quarantine for less than 14 days, or if you do not need to self-quarantine, you should still monitor yourself for symptoms for the full 14 days. If you start to have any symptoms, call your doctor or nurse right away. You should also be extra careful about wearing a mask and social distancing during this time.

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

What should I do if someone in my home has COVID-19?

If someone in your home has COVID-19, there are additional things you can do to protect yourself and others:

- **Keep the sick person away from others** – The sick person should stay in a separate room and use a different bathroom if possible. They should also eat in their own room.
- **Have them wear a mask** – The sick person should wear a mask when they are in the same room as other people. If they can't wear a mask, you can help protect yourself by covering your face when you are in the room with them.
- **Open windows** – If possible, keep some windows in the home open, including in the room where the sick person is, to help airflow.
- **Wash hands** – Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- **Clean often** – Here are some specific things that can help:
 - Regularly clean things that are touched a lot. This includes counters, bedside tables, doorknobs, computers, phones, and bathroom surfaces.
 - Clean things in your home with soap and water, but also use disinfectants on appropriate surfaces. Some cleaning products work well to kill bacteria, but not viruses, so it's important to check labels. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a list of products here: www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2.

What if I was exposed to COVID-19 during my hospital stay?

Though rare, during times of widespread community transmission, exposure to COVID-19 can sometimes occur during your hospital stay. For patients admitted to the hospital, wearing a mask when others are around you — including other patients, health care team members, and visitors — can substantially reduce the risk of transmission.

In the unlikely event an exposure to COVID-19 occurs inside the hospital, your attending physician or a member of our health care team will speak with you about the exposure, gather information about the event, and discuss appropriate next steps.

Prevention

How can I prevent COVID-19 infection?

The best way to prevent COVID-19 is to get vaccinated. In the United States, the first vaccines became available in late 2020. People age 12 and older are eligible to get vaccinated.

Once you are fully vaccinated, you are much less likely to get the virus. "Fully vaccinated" means you have had all recommended doses of the vaccine and it has been at least 2 weeks since the last dose.

All currently available vaccines in the US are considered safe and effective at preventing COVID-19, and people who are fully vaccinated are at much lower risk of getting COVID-19.

If you are not fully vaccinated, there are other ways to help protect yourself and others:

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

- **Practice social distancing:** It's most important to avoid contact with people who are sick. But social distancing also means staying at least 6 feet (about 2 meters) from anyone outside your household. That's because the virus can spread easily through close contact, and it's not always possible to know who is infected.
- **Wear a face mask:** This is particularly important when you are indoors around other people. When wearing a mask, you are less likely to spread the infection to other people, even if you are asymptomatic (don't feel sick/have no symptoms). Masks also provide some protection for you from others who could be infected. It's important that the mask you wear covers your nose and mouth at all times.
- **Wash your hands often:** This is especially important after being out in public or touching surfaces that many other people also touch, like door handles or railings. The risk of getting infected by touching items like this is probably low, but practicing hand hygiene is always a good idea.
- **Avoid touching your face:** In particular, avoid touching your mouth, nose, and eyes.
- **Avoid or limit traveling if you can:** Any form of travel--international or domestic--increases your risk of getting and spreading COVID-19.

These are important ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in general when there are many cases in the community. Even fully vaccinated people should wear masks when in public indoor spaces, social distance, wash your hands and avoid touching your face when community levels of COVID-19 are high.

Pregnant

What if I am pregnant?

According to the CDC, the overall risk of severe COVID-19 illness in pregnancy is low, but pregnant people are at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 when compared to non-pregnant people.

Having certain underlying medical conditions, and other factors, including age, can further increase a pregnant or recently pregnant (for at least 42 days following end of pregnancy) person's risk for developing severe COVID-19 illness.

Pregnant people with COVID-19 are also at increased risk for preterm birth (delivering the baby earlier than 37 weeks) and might be at increased risk for other poor pregnancy outcomes.

If you are pregnant and you have questions about COVID-19, including about the COVID-19 vaccine, talk to your doctor, nurse, or midwife. They can help.

General information & symptoms

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 stands for "coronavirus disease 2019." It is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The virus first appeared in late 2019 and quickly spread around the world.

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms usually start 4 or 5 days after a person is infected with the virus. In some people, symptoms can take as long as 2 weeks to appear. Some people never show symptoms at all.

When symptoms do happen, they can include:

- Fever and chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Problems with sense of smell or taste
- Gastrointestinal symptoms, such as nausea or diarrhea

For most people, symptoms will get better within a few weeks. But a small number of people get very sick and stop being able to breathe on their own. In severe cases, their organs stop working, which can lead to death.

Some people with COVID-19 continue to have some symptoms for weeks or months. This seems to be more likely in people who are sick enough to need to stay in the hospital. But this can also happen in people who did not get very sick. Doctors are still learning about the long-term effects of COVID-19.

While children can get COVID-19, they are less likely than adults to have severe symptoms.

How is COVID-19 spread?

The virus that causes COVID-19 mainly spreads from person-to-person. This usually happens when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks near other people. The virus is passed through tiny particles from the infected person's lungs and airway. These particles can easily travel through the air to other people who are nearby.

The virus can be passed easily between people who live together. But it can also spread at gatherings where people are in close contact with one another. Eating at restaurants raises the risk of infection, since people tend to be close to each other and not masked. Doctors also think it is possible to get infected if you touch a surface that has the virus on it and then touch your mouth, nose, or eyes. However, this is probably less common.

A person can be infected, and spread the virus to others, even without having any symptoms.

Are there different strains or variants of the virus that causes COVID-19?

Yes. Viruses constantly change or "mutate." When this happens, a new strain or "variant" can form. Most of the time, new variants do not change the way a virus works. But when a variant has changes in important parts of the virus, it can act differently.

Experts have discovered several new variants of the virus that causes COVID-19. Certain variants seem to spread more easily than the original virus. They might also make people sicker. Beaumont collects

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

samples from patients and submits some of these samples to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to determine what type of variant is present. This information helps us understand which variants are currently circulating in our community.

Talk to your doctor, health care team, or public health department for more information about the current variants in your community.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

If you have a fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms of COVID-19, call your doctor or nurse. They will ask about your symptoms, and they can tell you if you should come in or go somewhere else to be tested.

If your symptoms are not severe, it is best to **call before you go** into the office. The staff can tell you what to do and whether you need to be seen in person. Many people with only mild symptoms should stay home and avoid other people until they get better. If you do need to go to the clinic or hospital, be sure to wear a mask.

If you are severely ill and need to go to the clinic or hospital right away, you should still **call ahead** if possible. This way the staff can care for you while taking steps to protect others. If you think you are having a medical emergency, call for an ambulance or dial 911.

Can I get infected with COVID-19 if I've had it before, or if I've been vaccinated?

Prior infection with COVID-19 and vaccination both trigger an immune response within the body that is designed to prevent a person from getting infected. Getting re-infected after having COVID-19 or after getting vaccinated is rare, but possible. After becoming infected with COVID-19, the risk of becoming infected again within the next 90 day is extremely unlikely.

Persons with weaker immune systems may be less likely to build a strong immune response to the virus that causes COVID-19, and they may be at risk for re-infection — or the vaccine might have diminished effectiveness.

Where can I go to learn more?

As we learn more about this virus, expert recommendations will continue to change. If you have questions, talk with your doctor or health care provider to get the most current information on COVID-19. For information about COVID-19 in your local community, you can call your local public health department. Check out the following websites for more information on COVID-19:

- Beaumont Health Coronavirus Information page: www.beaumont.org/coronavirus
- United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/COVID19
- World Health Organization (WHO): <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>