



Communications Workers of America

CORONAVIRUS: COVID-19 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How can I get tested for the coronavirus?

If you are a close contact of someone with COVID-19 or you are a resident in a community where there is ongoing spread of COVID-19 and develop symptoms of COVID-19, call your healthcare provider and tell them about your symptoms and your exposure. They will decide whether you need to be tested. Testing availability varies greatly by state and local area. There is currently not enough testing available in the U.S. for everyone who wants to be tested. Keep in mind that there is no treatment for COVID-19. People who are mildly ill will be asked to isolate and care for themselves at home so as not to over burden the healthcare system. Speak to your healthcare provider if your symptoms get worse or if you have difficulty breathing which will likely require hospitalization.

2. What are the symptoms of coronavirus?

COVID-19 symptoms typically occur between two and 14 days of infection and include fever, cough and shortness of breath. Some individuals may experience gastrointestinal symptoms and diarrhea. Loss of smell has been reported as an early warning sign. The severity of symptoms ranges widely, from mild – milder than the flu – to severe illness, and even death. Some infected individuals exhibit no symptoms.

3. Who is at greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19?

As per the CDC (March 22, 2020) based upon available information to date, those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 include:

- People aged 65 years and older
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility
- Other high-risk conditions could include:
 - People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
 - People who have serious heart conditions

- People who are immunocompromised including cancer treatment
- People of any age with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] >40) or certain underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, such as those with diabetes, renal failure, hypertension or liver disease might also be at risk
- People who are pregnant should be monitored since they are known to be at risk with severe viral illness, however, to date data on COVID-19 has not shown increased risk

Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications

4. How can I avoid getting the coronavirus?

COVID-19 is believed to spread mainly between people who are close (within 6 feet) contact with one another, by respiratory transmission – via droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Airborne transmission of small aerosols can also occur, although the degree of risk is unknown. There is also risk that spread can occur through indirect contact from surfaces infected with the virus, but this is not believed to be the main way the virus spreads. People are thought to be most contagious when they show the greatest symptoms, although some spread might be possible before people show symptoms.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent illness is to avoid as much contact with people to avoid being exposed to the virus, and by taking every day preventative precautions as with the flu and other respiratory illness:

- Avoid crowded places. This includes non-essential travel such as long plane trips. Especially avoid cruise ships. If you must go to a grocery store, bank, or other essential location, avoid going during crowded hours.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- 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 using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- 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 with at least 60% alcohol.
- Get a flu vaccine.

Face masks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease.

5. Should I go to the doctor if I think I might have coronavirus?

People who think they may have been exposed to COVID-19 or who have symptoms of COVID-19 should contact their healthcare provider immediately, but should avoid going into the office or facility unless directed to do so. For more mild cases, doctors will encourage you to stay home and consult with them by phone to avoid further spread of the virus. There is no specific antiviral treatment currently recommended for COVID-19. People with the disease should receive supportive care, such as rest and drink fluids, to help relieve their symptoms. For severe cases, treatment will include care to support vital organ functions.

If you have a medical appointment, call your doctor's office or emergency department beforehand to tell them you may have COVID-19. This will help the office protect themselves and other patients.

6. What should I do if I have the coronavirus?

- **Stay home.** People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to recover at home. Do not leave, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas. Here is a link for information about preparing your home:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/index.html>
 Here is a link for information if you are sick or caring for someone who is sick:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/index.html>

- **Stay in touch with your doctor.** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you feel worse or you think it is an emergency.
- **Avoid public transportation.**
- **Separate yourself from other people in your home.** You should also restrict contact with pets or other animals, as you would around other people.
- **Wear a facemask if you are sick to avoid spreading infectious droplets when you sneeze or cough.**
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.**
- **Clean your hands often.**
- **Avoid sharing personal household items.**
- **Clean all “high-touch” surfaces every day.**
- **Contact your Local union and employer** to let them know.
- **Monitor your symptoms.** Seek medical attention, but call first. Follow care instructions from your healthcare provider and local health department. Your local health authorities will give instructions on checking your symptoms and reporting information. **Call 911 if you have a medical emergency.**

7. If I had or suspected I had the coronavirus, when can I stop home isolation?

If you do not have a test to determine if you are still contagious, you can leave home after these three things have happened:

- You have had no fever for at least 72 hours (that is three full days of no fever without the use of medicine that reduces fevers)
- Other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough and shortness of breath have improved)
- At least 7 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared

8. OSHA gives me the right to refuse work that feels unsafe. Does this apply to going to work if I am afraid of being exposed to coronavirus?

There is no specific Occupational Safety and Health Act standard covering COVID-19. Generally, employees should not refuse work that seems unsafe without taking the following steps:

- 1) Contact your Local Union.
- 2) Always document unsafe working conditions.
- 3) Voice your concerns to your supervisor. Keep a record of the conversation.
- 4) Ask for alternative work that removes you from the immediate danger of the unsafe working conditions.

Taking these steps will not guarantee that you don't receive discipline for not reporting to work. They will, however, strengthen your ability to win an unfair discipline case.

For workers who are covered by OSHA, other standards and directives may apply to COVID-19 risks. The Personal Protective Equipment standard (1910.132) requires that the employer assess and document the need for use of gloves, eye, face, and head protection based on the hazards. The OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard (1910.134) may also be applicable and if so, requires employers to implement a comprehensive program that meets the standard. The General Duty Clause does require employers to furnish a place of employment "free from recognized hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or serious physical harm."

OSHA prohibits employers from retaliating against workers for raising concerns about safety and health conditions. If you believe you have been retaliated against for using your health and safety rights including raising a health and safety concern, contact your local union immediately. Information about filing an OSHA Whistleblower complaint can be found at:

<https://www.whistleblowers.gov/>

9. Where can I learn more about the coronavirus?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.gov) and the World Health Organization (www.who.int) have the most robust information available about the coronavirus.