



## Protecting Yourself Against COVID-19

COVID-19 has become a global pandemic and all employees need to understand their role in preventing its spread in their homes, workplaces and communities. The importance of good hygiene and social distancing as the primary ways the general public can reduce the spread of the virus. It also shows examples of frequent handwashing and the disinfecting of commonly touched items in various home, office and workplace settings and emphasizes the importance of not touching our face with our hands. The program explains that infected droplets can travel six feet during a cough or sneeze and that covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the elbow is critical to containing the virus. Additionally, it points out that asymptomatic carriers can spread the virus to others and that social distancing and self-isolation when required are the best ways to prevent the spread of the infection. After watching this program, the viewer will have a good understanding of the signs and symptoms of a COVID-19 infection, know when to seek medical attention and when not to, understand the importance of social distancing and self-isolation and be able to put into practice the best methods to prevent the spread of the virus at home, in the workplace and in their community.

### COMMON TYPES OF CONTAGIOUS ILLNESSES

- Every year, like clockwork, the cold and flu season arrives and people all over the globe fall ill after becoming infected with a virus borne contagious illness.
- For example, the common cold and the seasonal flu are two examples we are all too familiar with. The seasonal flu is caused by an influenza virus and the common cold is caused by a coronavirus.
- Both types of viruses, influenza and corona, can evolve and change.
- Because of this, the virus that causes the seasonal flu is slightly different each year and a new vaccine must be developed annually to help prevent a widespread outbreak of the flu.
- In addition, new types of coronaviruses and influenza viruses can periodically manifest and begin spreading around the world leading to local, regional and global outbreaks of illness.
- The most recent example of this is the 2019 outbreak of a coronavirus borne respiratory disease that started in Wuhan, China and has quickly spread around the world.
- Known as “Coronavirus Disease 2019” or COVID-19 for short, this illness is highly contagious and there is currently no vaccine which can be used to stop its spread.
- In prior years, other new strains of corona and influenza viruses such as SARS and the H1N1 flu manifested and spread around the world in a similar manner.



## HOW A PERSON CAN BE INFECTED WITH THE COVID-19 VIRUS

- To prevent the spread of COVID-19, the seasonal flu and similar contagious illnesses, all employees, healthcare workers and members of the general public must understand how these viruses are spread and what measures must be taken to prevent becoming infected.
- COVID-19 can spread from person to person in the same manner as other coronaviruses and influenzas.
- When an infected person sneezes or coughs, tiny droplets of fluid containing the virus are expelled into the air. When these droplets come in contact with the eyes, nose or mouth of a nearby person, that person can become infected with the virus.
- This is the primary way in which the COVID-19 is spread. The active virus will typically travel a distance of up to 6 feet when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- In addition, the COVID-19 virus can survive on surfaces for several hours or longer. When a person touches an item or object that has been contaminated with a virus and then touches his or her face, eyes, nose or mouth, that person may also become infected.
- The current best available information indicates that the COVID-19 virus can survive on cardboard for 24 hours, copper for four hours, plastic and metal surfaces for three days and on cloth and clothing for three days.

## ASYMPTOMATIC CARRIERS & SOCIAL DISTANCING

- To prevent becoming infected with any type of contagious virus such as COVID-19 or the seasonal flu, you must avoid close contact with an infected person, and you must be vigilant in practicing good hygiene.
- It's critical to understand that many people who become infected with COVID-19 are asymptomatic, which means they are not experiencing any obvious symptoms of the disease. These people may not realize they are infected and show no outward indications they are carrying the virus.
- It is thought that the fast-paced spread of COVID-19 is partly due to asymptomatic carriers unwittingly spreading the virus to others.
- That is why the practice of social distancing is so important. To reduce the risk of becoming infected and to prevent spreading the virus to others, you should stay at least six feet or two meters away from other people whenever possible.
- In fact, during an outbreak many facilities and municipalities will be forced to shut down or severely limit operations and the practice of social distancing is frequently mandated for all people who are still permitted to enter the workplace, shop for supplies or stand in line for other purposes.



## PRECAUTIONS FOR PREVENTING INFECTION

- In addition to practicing social distancing, you must be vigilant in practicing good hygiene.
- Our hands can quickly become a source of infection because of the frequency with which we touch commonly used objects and then touch our face, eyes, nose or mouth.
- To prevent becoming infected in this manner, we must wash our hands frequently and we must also avoid touching our face with our hands.
- In order to kill viruses and germs, you must wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20-25 seconds.
- You must be thorough when washing. Be sure to wash between each finger as well as the back of the hand. Wash your hands frequently and always after a potential exposure.
- When soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol may also be used to clean your hands.
- It's also important to periodically sanitize commonly used items such as door handles, telephones, light switches and similar objects, especially if there have been confirmed cases of contagious illness in your workplace or an outbreak in your local area.
- There are a variety of sanitizing agents available for this purpose. The Centers for Disease Control recommends a simple solution of one quarter cup bleach per gallon of water.

## WEARING MASKS

- It's important to note that it is not necessary, or recommended, for a healthy person to wear a surgical mask or N95 respirator in an attempt to prevent being infected. The use of these masks should be limited to infected persons and their healthcare providers.
- The purpose of these masks in a healthcare setting is to contain and control the infected droplets that are produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These masks are critical to keeping healthcare providers safe while working with patients.
- Again, a healthy person who is not in close proximity to an infected person has no need to wear a mask and should instead practice good hygiene, avoid touching their face and practice social distancing as the most effective means to avoid infection.



## SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19

- The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to those of other respiratory infections, including fever, cough and shortness of breath. Health officials have noted that symptoms usually begin between two and 14 days after exposure.
- Some patients infected with COVID-19 exhibit little or no symptoms, while others become severely ill and die.
- During a large outbreak, your local medical facilities may be overwhelmed with critically ill patients and it's important that you not go to the emergency room or hospital for mild symptoms.
- Many people who experience mild symptoms fully recover with no medical assistance; however, a person should seek immediate medical attention if they experience difficulty breathing or are severely short of breath, have a persistent pain or pressure in the chest, confusion that is new or an inability to arouse or blue lips or face, which is an indication of lack of oxygen.
- Older adults and people with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension or respiratory issues are more at risk of developing life-threatening complications from COVID-19.

## PRECAUTIONS FOR PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF VIRUSES TO OTHERS

- To prevent the chance of spreading any type of virus to others, you should always cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- One method is to use a tissue or paper towel for this purpose and then immediately throw it away and then thoroughly wash your hands.
- Another method is to cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder to contain any expelled droplets and then thoroughly wash your hands.
- Any person who has symptoms of COVID-19, the seasonal flu or other contagious illness has a responsibility to avoid contact with others to prevent spreading the illness.
- Voluntary isolation is a responsible way to minimize the spread of contagious infections.
- If you are sick, do not report to work. If your children are sick, do not send them to school or to childcare. Isolate yourself at home and contact your physician or other healthcare provider.
- Report your symptoms to the doctor and let them know if you have traveled to any areas of known COVID-19 outbreaks or if you have knowingly been exposed to the COVID-19 virus.



- If you plan on visiting the doctor's office, it's important that your healthcare provider know in advance if you suspect you have COVID-19 or other contagious illness.
- This will allow them to be prepared and implement infection control practices to protect other patients and caregivers from exposure. You will likely be asked to wear a mask and you may be isolated from other patients.

#### REDUCING THE RISK OF INFECTION WHILE CARING FOR A SICK PERSON

- When caring for a sick person in your home that may have COVID-19 or other contagious illness, it is critical to take steps reduce the risk of transmission from the patient to the caregiver.
- Only one person, in good health, should be assigned to care for the patient. No visitors should be allowed.
- Anytime the home caregiver and patient are in close proximity, the patient should wear a surgical type mask to help control the spread of the virus by cough or sneeze.
- A caregiver should also wear a mask and disposable gloves. The idea here is to limit the possibility of infected droplets transferring from the infected patient directly to the caregiver's mouth, nose or eyes in the event of a cough or sneeze.
- Any disposable masks should be discarded after each use.
- Unfortunately, masks and gloves may be in short supply during an outbreak and you may need to consult the most up-to-date governmental recommendations for alternatives.
- The caregiver must always avoid touching their face with their hands while caring for the patient.
- When removing disposable gloves, carefully hold the glove by the cuff without touching your skin and pull the glove off while allowing it to turn inside out. While continuing to hold the removed glove in your fingers, slide a finger under the cuff of the remaining glove without touching the outside surface of the glove. Then use your finger to roll the glove inside out and dispose of both gloves in a segregated biohazard waste container.
- Always wash your hands immediately after removing disposable gloves.
- The caregiver should wash their hands with soap and water or disinfect them with a solution of at least 60 percent alcohol after each contact with the ill person and their immediate environment.
- Drying the hands with paper towels and then discarding them is recommended.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces that are frequently touched by the patient or caregiver. Use a regular household disinfectant or a solution of one quarter cup of bleach to one gallon of water.



## PANDEMIC RESPONSE MEASURES

- The fast, global spread of COVID-19 has now reached pandemic status. A pandemic occurs when a highly contagious infectious disease emerges quickly throughout a large human population and causes serious illness on a global scale.
- Even during a global pandemic, certain areas or regions will experience higher numbers of infections than others. For this reason, the measures put into place by local and national authorities may differ from region to region.
- Restricting travel to and from certain regions and requiring quarantine for new arrivals or those showing symptoms will be one of the first measures taken to control an outbreak or pandemic.
- More restrictive regional measures may also be taken in areas of an outbreak, such as cancelling public events, restricting large gatherings or closing public transportation.
- During a severe outbreak, certain types of businesses may be forced to close, school may be canceled and people who perform jobs deemed as non-essential may be required to stay isolated in their homes.
- If you live in an area where these types of severe restrictions or a “lock down” has occurred, it is important to follow the instructions of local authorities in order to reduce the spread of the infection.
- During a pandemic such as this, the goal is to reduce the rate of infection, so the healthcare systems are not overwhelmed. Everyone must do their part, even if they believe they are not infected.
- Even in areas where restrictions are not mandatory, talk to your manager or supervisor to determine if it is possible to work from home or from a remote location during an outbreak.

## DEVELOPING A PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS PLAN

- During a pandemic, you will need to stock your home with at least a two-week supply of water and food. You should also have a continuous supply of all household members’ regular prescription drugs on hand for a two-week duration.
- Make sure you have an ample supply of any nonprescription drugs and any other health or hygiene necessities that you may need.
- Get copies and maintain electronic versions of your health records.
- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick or determine what would be needed to care for them in your home.



- For general preparedness, agree on a point of contact where all family members can check in and report their wellbeing.
- Stay informed about the pandemic through web sites such as the Center for Disease Control, as well as the websites of local agencies and radio and television broadcasts.

#### SUMMARY

- Your health and wellness, as well as the health and wellness of your co-workers, friends and loved ones, depends on your ability to prevent and control the spread of contagious illnesses such as COVID-19, the seasonal flu and other strains of corona and influenza viruses.
- Frequent hand washing and avoiding touching your face, sanitizing frequently touched objects, covering your coughs and sneezes, practicing social distancing, staying home when you are ill or have symptoms and obeying any local restrictions or lockdowns are the simple and practical things you can do to help control the spread of contagious illness in your home, workplace and community.
- Follow the instructions of local and national health officials. After all, preventing the spread of contagious illness or infection is everyone's responsibility.