COVID-19 (2019 Novel Coronavirus)

Information for High-Risk Individuals

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a viral respiratory illness that can lead to lower respiratory illnesses like pneumonia and bronchitis. Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent COVID-19.

How is COVID-19 spread?

- Close contact with an infected person (within six feet)
- Respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks
- Contact with infected surfaces or objects then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes
- Spread by people who are not showing symptoms (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2020d)

What are the symptoms?

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea (CDC, 2020e)

Symptoms may appear 2–14 days after exposure to the virus.

Am I at higher risk of contracting COVID-19?

You are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 if you

- Are 65 years of age or older
- Live in a nursing home or long-term care facility
- Have underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including:
  - Heart disease such as hypertension (Zhou et al., 2020) and coronary heart disease
  - Lung disease like asthma, emphysema, and COPD
  - Weakened immune system such as cancer patients with hematologic [blood] malignancies, cancer patients in active chemotherapy, people with HIV/AIDS, and smokers (Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, 2020)
  - Diabetes (CDCf, 2020)

I fall into a high-risk category. How do I prevent COVID-19 infection?

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds—if soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid sharing household items like dishes, drinking glasses, towels, or bedding.
- Whenever possible, avoid touching high-touch surfaces—i.e. door handles, handrails, countertops.
- Avoid shaking hands.
- Wash your hands after being in public places.
- Avoid touching your face (nose, eyes, mouth in particular).
- Regularly disinfect your home, paying close attention to high-touch surfaces, i.e. doorknobs, light switches, desks, cell phones, and countertops.
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved household disinfectants. Some examples include:
  - Clorox Multi Surface Cleaner + Bleach
  - PURELL Professional Surface Disinfectant Wipes
  - Lysol Disinfectant Spray
  - Lysol Clean & Fresh Multi-Surface Cleaner
  - For a comprehensive Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) list, visit https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf
- If COVID-19 is spreading in your community, stay home as much as possible.
- Avoid all non-essential travel (CDC, 2020a).
How do I prepare for a COVID-19 outbreak if I am high risk?

Prepare yourself, your household, and your community for an outbreak.

- **Continue your medications and do not change your treatment plan without talking to your doctor.**
- **Have the necessary supplies on hand.**
  - Contact your healthcare provider to ask about obtaining extra necessary medications and other health guidance.
  - Consider mail-ordering your medications.
  - Have over-the-counter medicines and supplies to treat fever and other symptoms of COVID-19.
    - Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid), Tylenol (acetaminophen), Aleve (naproxen) etc.
- **Have enough household items and groceries including toiletries** on hand to stay at home for a prolonged period of time or have a plan with your family and community to ensure you can get the supplies you need.
- **Make a plan you can follow if there is an outbreak in your community.**
  - Consider who needs to be included in your plan.
    - Identify aid organizations in your community to contact in case you need support or resources.
    - Create an emergency contact list.
    - Consider including family, friends, neighbors, carpool drivers, health care providers (physician, nurse, doctor), teachers, employers, etc.
- **Call your healthcare provider if you have any concerns about your underlying medical conditions or if you get sick and think that you may have COVID-19.** If you need emergency help, call 911.
- **Stay up to date on your vaccinations** and have your vaccination records on hand.
- **If you live alone, stay in touch with others by phone, text, or email** (CDC, 2020g; Washington State Department of Health, 2020).

What do I do if I am high risk and experiencing symptoms?

- **Monitor your symptoms.**
  - Write down any symptoms you may be having.
  - Record your temperature and write it down. Make sure to record your temperature **BEFORE** taking any medications that can lower your body temperature.
- **Call your healthcare provider before going to the clinic or hospital.**
  - It may be recommended that you stay home and monitor your symptoms rather than coming in.
  - Put on a facemask that covers your nose and mouth before you enter any facility or emergency vehicle.
  - Seek prompt medical attention if your illness is worsening (difficulty breathing or shortness of breath)
  - Before seeking care, call your healthcare provider.
- **Separate yourself** from other people and animals in your home (Washing State Department of Health, 2020).
- **Take care of your emotional health.**
  - Outbreaks and sickness can be stressful.

References:


