

From our Registered Nurse:

Coronavirus Transmission

How does the virus spread?

The virus travels in tiny drops of water that leave our bodies when we breathe, talk, sneeze, or cough. These drops travel through the air from a sick person and can infect someone else via their mouth, nose, or eyes. The way the coronavirus spreads is very similar to the common cold or flu. You cannot catch the virus through food or water, cuts on your skin, standing near 5G cell towers, insect bites, or many other methods you may have heard.

If no one around me is sneezing or coughing, does that mean I can't get the virus from them?

An infected person can start spreading the virus up to 5 days before they start showing any symptoms. Also, many people who get the virus never have any symptoms but can still pass it on to others. Regular breaths send out water droplets into the air that can contain the virus. It's how you can fog up a window by breathing on it. If a person is infected, whether they have symptoms or not, every time they breathe out, they will release some of the virus. If they talk or sing, they will release more, and if they sneeze or cough, they will release a lot.

Does this mean I can get sick just by being near an infected person?

It depends on where you are, how long you are there, and what you are doing. The longer you are in the area, the higher your risk. If you are outside, the risk is much lower since the wind and sunlight will usually break up the virus droplets before they can travel very far. If you are indoors, especially in a small room, the virus can spread easily through stagnant air. If people in the area are talking a lot, more drops are going out into the air. A quick trip through the grocery store is probably fairly safe: people don't talk much, there is plenty of room to keep distance, and you can be in and out in a few minutes. A crowded restaurant is much higher risk: there are lots of people in a small space, people tend to talk loudly, and you could end up staying an hour or more.



How far should I stay away from other people?

The CDC recommends keeping at least 6 feet of distance between you and other people. This lowers the amount of droplets that can reach between one person and the next. Many stores will have signs or tape on the floor to help you keep this distance while standing in line. Remember though that 6 feet is not a force field, it is possible to contract the virus from further away, especially in poorly ventilated indoor environments where the smallest particles can hang in the air for long periods of time.

If the virus travels through the air, why do I have to wash my hands so much?

If an infected person sneezes into their hands and shakes your hand, enough of the virus could stay on your hands to make you sick if you touched your nose, mouth, or eyes soon after. This could also happen if you touched a surface like a door handle or a keyboard that an infected person touched recently. While the risk of catching the virus this way is much lower, it is still possible, so you should wash your hands often. You might be tempted to wear gloves in public, but you can still move the virus from your hands to your face or from one object to another while wearing gloves. It is better to wash your hands regularly and save your gloves for when you clean your house, or if you care for a sick relative. You don't need them for everyday errands.

Updated 12/3/2020

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

<https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/gloves.html>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-basics>

