

COVID-19: What To Do If You Are Sick

Coronavirus disease 2019, or COVID-19, is a new respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The most common signs and symptoms include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, which are similar to the symptoms of influenza and other respiratory viruses. Community spread of COVID-19 is occurring in Chicago. You generally need to be in close contact with a person sick with COVID-19 to get infected (i.e. being within 6 feet of a sick person with COVID-19 for about 10 minutes). However, you might have been exposed to someone sick with COVID-19 without even knowing it. If you have a fever, cough or difficulty breathing, follow the steps below to help prevent COVID-19 from spreading to people in our homes and communities.

Who is at higher risk of severe illness?

Those at higher risk include:

- People over 60 years of age. The risk increases significantly thereafter and escalates with age, with persons over age 80 in the highest risk category.
- People, regardless of age, with underlying health conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, or chronic lung diseases like COPD, as well as those with severely weakened immune systems.

Should I go to my doctor and get tested for COVID-19?

If you have any of the conditions that may increase your risk for a serious viral infection—age 60 years or over, are pregnant, or have medical conditions—call your physician’s office and ask if you need to be evaluated in person. They may want to monitor your health more closely or test you for COVID-19.

If you do NOT have a high-risk condition and your symptoms are mild, you do NOT need to be evaluated in person and do NOT need to be tested for COVID-19. You will receive the same advice whether or not you have a test. For example, there is no special medicine available for treating COVID-19. Most importantly, you must stay home away from others for:

- at least 7 days since your symptoms first appeared; **and**,
- at least 3 days (72 hours) since recovery defined as no fever (without using fever-reducing medications) **and** improvement in symptoms.

For example, if you have a fever and coughing for 4 days, you need to stay home 3 more days with no fever for a total of 7 days. Or, if you have a fever and coughing for 5 days, you need to stay home 3 more days with no fever for a total of 8 days.

If you develop emergency warning signs for COVID-19 get medical attention immediately. In adults, emergency warning signs include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or difficulty awakening the person
- Bluish lips or face

What should I do to protect my family and other people in the community?

Stay home except to get medical care

You should restrict activities outside your home, except for getting medical care. Again, you do not need to seek medical care if your symptoms are mild. Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.

Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home:

- People: As much as possible, you should stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home. Also, you should use a separate bathroom, if available.

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- **Animals:** Avoid contact with your pet including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food. There are no reports of animals being infected

Cover your coughs and sneezes

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in a lined trash can; immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 to 95% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water is preferred if hands are visibly dirty.

Avoid sharing personal household items

You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people or pets in your home. After using these items, they should be washed thoroughly with soap and water.

Clean your hands often

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water is preferred if hands are visibly dirty. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Clean all "high-touch" surfaces every day

High touch surfaces include counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables. Also, clean any surfaces that may have blood, stool, or body fluids on them. Use a household cleaning spray or wipe, according to the label instructions. Labels contain instructions for safe and effective use of the cleaning product including precautions you should take when applying the product, such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.

Monitor your symptoms

Seek prompt medical attention if your illness is worsening. Call your healthcare provider and tell them that your symptoms are consistent with COVID-19. If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that you have symptoms consistent with COVID-19. If possible, put on a face mask before emergency medical services arrive. If your illness is mild, you do not need to be evaluated by a medical provider, but you should stay home, avoid contact with other people and animals, and monitor your symptoms.

Call ahead before visiting your doctor

Before seeking care, call your healthcare provider and tell them that your symptoms are consistent with COVID-19. Put on a face mask before you enter the facility. These steps will help the healthcare provider's office to keep other people in the office or waiting room from getting infected or exposed.

What if you don't have a doctor?

If you do not have a medical provider and have insurance and believe you need non-emergency medical services, you can contact your insurance carrier to help locate care. If you have misplaced your insurance card, your employer's benefits manager (usually human resources department) can provide you with the contact information.

If you do not have a medical provider, are uninsured, or have limited or no income and believe you need non-emergency medical services, you can contact your nearest community health center (CHC) by phone and inform them of your need. They will work with you to coordinate appropriate care. CHCs receive funding from the federal government that allows them to charge each patient on a sliding scale fee based on the patient's income and ability to pay.

No patient will be turned away because of inability to pay. There are approximately 165 CHCs throughout the city of Chicago. You can find your nearest CHC at findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov.

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