



MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL

Massachusetts General Hospital Department of Neurology

COVID 19 (Coronavirus) Patient Information Bulletin March 13th, 2020

What is COVID-19?

There are many types of coronaviruses, which can cause different types of viral infections. The type of coronavirus in the news right now is the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2 is the virus that causes the disease COVID-19). Individuals with COVID-19 have mild to severe respiratory (breathing) problems.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

COVID-19 causes cold or flu-like symptoms. These may include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, body aches, or chills. It can cause serious problems, such as shortness of breath, pneumonia (from the virus), possibly respiratory failure requiring a breathing machine (a type of life support), and even death, especially in older people and people with other health problems. Some people don't experience any symptoms at all but could nonetheless spread the virus to someone else.

Who is at risk of getting sick with COVID-19?

While anyone can get COVID-19, currently it appears that patients who are older, have suppressed immune systems, or have chronic medical conditions are more likely to experience serious illness with COVID-19.

We are sending you this information because our records suggest that you have a condition that may increase your risk of developing severe disease if you are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19

If I get exposed to COVID-19, will I develop infection?

Not everyone who is exposed to the virus will become infected. And not all of those who are infected will develop symptoms or go on to have severe disease. If symptoms develop, they will occur between 2-14 days after exposure, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

How is COVID-19 spread?

- If you are within 6 feet of someone with COVID-19 infection, the infection could spread to you through droplets when the person sneezes or coughs.
- If you touch an object – such as a door handle – that has the COVID-19 virus on it, and then you touch your mouth, nose, or eyes, you can infect yourself.
- If you are helping care for someone with COVID-19 and you within 6 feet of them when they cough, sneeze.



Is COVID-19 spread through the air?

No. COVID-19 does not travel through the air – other than up to six feet of an infected person as described above.

Are there treatments for COVID-19?

Treatment is supportive. There are no medications available yet that are proven to treat the virus and no vaccination to prevent it. Experimental trials are being developed.

How can I protect myself from getting COVID-19?

- Wash your hands frequently, and in particular after you have been in a public place. Wash for 20 seconds (about as long as it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice). Liquid soap is preferred. As an alternative you can use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Do not touch your eyes, mouth, and nose, especially with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people who are ill.
- Avoid crowded public places. As the virus becomes more common in our area, it may be helpful to stay away from public places as much as possible.
- Obtain sufficient food, medications, and other needed items so that you can avoid public places if advised.
- Consider letting people you are socializing with know that you must take extra steps to prevent COVID-19 and ask that they tell you or avoid you if they might have exposure to or symptoms of COVID-19.
- Eat with utensils, not with your hands, and wash your hands before eating
- Avoid shaking hands even in a business setting.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces, particularly after coming in from outside or after you have had visitors.

Does wearing a mask reduce my risk of becoming infected?

- Because it is not clear that wearing a mask protects people from becoming infected with viruses, the CDC is not recommending the use of masks.

How can people around me prevent the spread of COVID-19?

- Everyone should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. The tissue should be thrown away and hands washed or sanitized. If a tissue is not available, they should cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve.
- Facemasks should be used by people with symptoms such as cough, sore throat, or fever, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others.

Should I avoid travel?

Mass General encourages all patients to follow the CDC’s guidelines, which can be found on its website. At this time, we recommend that all patients at increased risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 avoid all non-essential travel both domestically and abroad. Travel by public transportation locally may also increase the risk of exposure to COVID-19.



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Should I stop taking any of my medications?

At this time, we do not recommend that you stop any of your prescription medications unless you have been instructed to do so by the physician prescribing the medication.

What should I do if I have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 but do not have symptoms?

There are no available treatments to prevent individuals who have been exposed from becoming ill. However, if you become infected, you could spread COVID-19 to others. You may need to “self-quarantine,” staying in your home without leaving for 14 days. Public health authorities will provide instructions regarding any restrictions in your movement.

What should I do if I develop symptoms that might be COVID-19?

- Always call 911 for a life-threatening emergency.
- For other situations, you **must call ahead to your MGH physician’s office for instructions about what to do. DO NOT COME to an urgent care clinic or emergency room.**
 - If you have a cold, cough or fever at the time of your appointment, please call the office number below, your doctor may recommend home treatment for a period of time.
 - The number for your physician’s office is:
 - Neuroimmunology and Neuro Infectious Diseases: 617-726-7565
 - Pediatric Neurology: 617-724-6400
 - Neuromuscular: 617-726-3642
 - Comprehensive Neurology (*Dr. Bart Chwalisz*): 617-726-8639

Useful Resources

General information from CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/index.html>

Pandemic preparedness: <https://www.ready.gov>

Travel information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

CDC website on handwashing: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>