

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: NOVEL CORONAVIRUS 2019

(Updated March 11, 2020)

1. WHAT IS A CORONAVIRUS?

A coronavirus describes a large number of viruses that usually cause mild respiratory illness. But there are coronaviruses that have caused more severe illness, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). Novel coronavirus 2019 is a new coronavirus and can cause pneumonia. Other terms you may see used to name this virus include: COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, or 2019-nCoV.

2. WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF CORONAVIRUS?

This is a respiratory illness. Symptoms include cough, fever, and/or difficulty breathing. The degree of severity of these symptoms varies. This disease can cause pneumonia. There have been deaths from this illness. However, most cases (80%) do not appear to be severe. People may experience symptoms similar to a cold or the flu.

3. WHERE DID THIS VIRUS COME FROM AND HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Like MERS and SARS, COVID-19 closely resembles coronaviruses found in bats but not humans. Scientists believe that the bat virus had a change in its genes that permitted it to spread to humans, possibly via an intermediate carrier (snakes) in an animal market in Wuhan, China. Early on, it is difficult to know the exact source of the virus, how well it spreads from person to person, and how severe the infection is. The virus can be transmitted from person to person via droplets that come from the nose or mouth when we cough or sneeze. Those droplets can directly enter the nose, mouth or eyes of a person standing close by, or they can be indirectly transmitted by hands and inanimate objects.

Human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through: the air by coughing and sneezing, close personal contact like shaking hands, or touching a surface with the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands.

4. WHAT ARE RISKS FOR GETTING THE VIRUS?

The potential public health threat posed by COVID-19 is high, both globally and to the United States. However, individual risk is dependent on exposure.

People who are close contacts of someone with a confirmed case of the 2019 novel coronavirus or who have traveled from another affected country or geographic area in the last 14 days are at higher risk of becoming infected.

Close contacts of confirmed cases are advised to self-monitor for symptoms and, if they develop symptoms like a fever, cough or difficulty breathing, to self-isolate and seek medical guidance by calling their health care provider. Close contacts of confirmed cases in Snohomish County are being contacted by public health staff.

The table below gives a quick overview of quarantine and isolation guidance.

General Guidance for Isolation/Quarantine

Test status	Individual	Close Contacts	Other Precautions
Not Tested	If ill, stay home until 72 hours after fever resolves or 7 days after illness began, whichever is longer.	No extra measures needed.	No extra measures needed.
Test Pending	Remain isolated, away from others in the home, until results come back.	If ill, stay home. If fever-free and no symptoms, free to go about normal activities.	No extra measures needed.
Negative	If ill, stay home until 72 hours after fever resolves or 7 days after illness began, whichever is longer.	No extra measures needed.	No extra measures needed.
Positive/Confirmed	Remain isolated at home until 7 days after onset of symptoms or 72 hours after symptoms resolve, whichever is longer. If symptoms worsen, call provider for further evaluation. If life threatening emergency, call 911.	If identified by the Snohomish Health District as a close contact, remain quarantined at home for 14 days for symptom monitoring and/or testing.	School, workplace or other facility where a confirmed case has been present may need to notify students, staff and families.

This is an evolving situation and the District’s role and guidance may change (sometimes rapidly) with the passage of time, a change in circumstances, and/or release of updated guidelines from DOH and CDC.

5. HOW MANY COVID-19 CASES ARE THERE IN SNOHOMISH COUNTY?

Starting March 11, our daily update on case counts will be issued at approximately 2 p.m.

Please be aware, as more testing has become available, we are getting increased numbers of reports from laboratories and other facilities. It takes time to reconcile data in order to report numbers accurately.

In addition, we report case numbers, including numbers of deaths, each day that are official through 11:59 p.m. the night before. Media may hear directly from health care facilities that provide different numbers of deaths than our official count, and may be

providing it before we have the information and a chance to reconcile the data.

Due to the increased numbers of cases and more data flowing into the Snohomish Health District that needs to be analyzed, we are no longer able to provide specific information about all cases as we did earlier in this outbreak. We will continue to provide details on deaths, when available, for the time being.

If there is a case in someone at a school, workplace or other facility, there may be additional communication from the affected facility to notify students, staff and families. The Health District is coordinating with local partners to help provide accurate information and guidance.

The tally of confirmed or presumptive positive cases is not the full picture. There are likely additional cases who do not have symptoms or have mild symptoms, similar to a cold or the flu, and have not been identified through testing. Although this illness can be severe, the majority of cases appear to be mild or moderate.

6. WHY AREN'T MORE SCHOOLS CLOSED?

Multiple local school districts have made the decision to close schools. These decisions were made by school district leadership.

The Health District continues to be in close communication with local school districts. Closures have a large impact on students, staff, and families, and require a lot of coordination.

As of March 11, the Health District is not requiring school closures. We do anticipate that closures will be required soon. We continue to work with school leaders to determine the best measures and to support school officials in making the best decisions for their students and families.

Watch for further communication from your local school district as well as from the Health District. As recommendations change, we will let you know.

We know that school districts act out of extra special caution when they are protecting children. And the school knows its community best and is in charge of making decisions about the school.

7. ARE PUBLIC GATHERINGS BEING CANCELED?

Dr. Chris Spitters, health officer for the Snohomish Health District, issued an order on March 11 that all events of more than 250 people are prohibited in Snohomish County.

Events with fewer than 250 attendees are prohibited unless organizers take steps to minimize risk. Those steps include:

- Older adults or people with underlying conditions are encouraged not to attend
- Social distancing recommendations are in place. People should avoid being within 6 feet of each other for longer than momentary or minimal contact.

- Employees are screened for coronavirus symptoms each day and excluded if symptomatic
- Proper hand hygiene and sanitation must be readily available to all attendees and employees
- Environmental cleaning guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are followed, including more cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces at least daily.

Events that are subject to this order include gatherings for business, social, spiritual, or recreational activities. This does include community, civic, public, faith-based, or sporting events, parades, concerts, festivals, conventions, and fundraisers. It does not include normal school, health care facilities, or other public safety and critical infrastructure operations.

Governor Jay Inslee also announced that gatherings of 250 or more people for social, spiritual or recreational activities are prohibited in Snohomish, King and Pierce counties through the end of the month. This order may be extended beyond that timeframe. This includes civic, faith-based, sporting, musical, fundraising, and similar events.

For non-essential smaller events, this is a good time to consider canceling or postponing.

In any event or group situation, the larger the group, the higher the risk. The closer the contact to others, the higher the risk.

For people who are at higher risk from COVID-19, extra precautions should be taken.

This includes those who are

- over 60 years of age
- have an underlying medical condition, like heart disease, lung disease or diabetes.
- have weakened immune systems
- or pregnant.

If you have questions about whether you or your child is at higher risk from COVID-19, ask your health care provider.

8. WHAT IS SOCIAL DISTANCING?

It's a common strategy for reducing the spread of disease. The closer the contact between people – and the more people in a group – the greater the risk of passing along viruses.

Try to keep at least 3 to 6 feet away (1-2 meters) away from others. Avoid handshakes and hugs – use smiles and “hellos” instead. If you want some kind of physical contact, go for fist or elbow bumps.

We recommend avoiding group gatherings, especially in poorly ventilated spaces.

Stay home when you have a compromised immune system; are pregnant; have a serious condition such as diabetes, heart disease or lung disease; or have a cough, fever, and/or difficulty breathing. People older than 60 are especially vulnerable to the COVID 19 virus. Consider having groceries and supplies delivered.

9. IS THERE A VACCINE FOR 2019 CORONAVIRUS?

At this time, there is no vaccine for coronavirus. Efforts are underway to develop a vaccine. However, it is not clear that an effective vaccine will emerge in time to have an impact on this epidemic. Until that time, we must proceed as though it will not be available.

You can help prevent the spread of illness by washing hands often with soap and running water, staying home if you are sick, avoiding close contact with others who are sick, covering your coughs or sneezes with a tissue, and cleaning and disinfecting objects and surfaces.

10. WHO SHOULD BE TESTED?

We do now have expanded options for coronavirus testing in Washington. People still need to contact their medical provider if they are ill in order to be evaluated for testing and it is not absolutely necessary for everyone with a cold to be tested for coronavirus. Your medical provider may want to monitor your illness or test you for something other than COVID-19, such as influenza.

Those who are being tested for COVID-19 are to remain isolated at home while results are pending. Others who live with them but are not ill will only be required to quarantine if the test results are positive.

It is important that people who are not ill do not go to the clinic or hospital seeking coronavirus testing. If you are ill and believe you may have been exposed to coronavirus, call ahead to your medical provider before coming in.

People who are ill only with mild cold symptoms also should NOT immediately go to a clinic, hospital or the Health District seeking coronavirus testing. Doing so displaces other patients who truly need urgent care and increases the risk of spread of respiratory infections in health care settings.

11. WHAT IF I CAN'T GET AN APPOINTMENT WITH MY PROVIDER?

The response to COVID-19 is demanding a tremendous amount from our health care system. The role of the health care system in this response is diagnosis, treatment, ongoing care, and addressing individual health concerns.

Health care providers may ask you to postpone non-urgent visits or procedures. They may also be providing tele-health options (consultations by phone or online).

If you are unable to get an appointment with your regular provider, check other local health care systems for available tele-health options.

12. WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE INSURANCE?

In response to the growing concern about COVID-19, the Washington Health Benefit Exchange on March 10 [announced a limited-time special enrollment period](#) for qualified people who are currently without insurance.

The special enrollment period continues through April 8. Those who are looking to enroll in health insurance should call the customer support center for the health benefit exchange between 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. That number is 1-855-923-4633

13. HOW LONG IS SOMEONE CONTAGIOUS?

We are still learning about this disease, which first was identified in China in December 2019. Based on our current understanding, symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure, and people are believed to be most contagious when they are symptomatic. This means someone who is infected is most likely to spread the illness when they are actively coughing or sneezing.

It is possible for people to spread the illness when they have mild symptoms or no symptoms. For confirmed or presumptive positive cases who are isolated at home during recovery, they are not released from isolation until follow-up tests have come back negative at least twice, showing that the virus is not present in samples from swabs of their mouth and nose. This may take several weeks.

It is possible that an undetected case who self-isolates because they were exposed or are not feeling well could be contagious after their symptoms go away. Transmission would be less likely when they don't have symptoms compared to when they are actively symptomatic, which is why encourage anyone who has symptoms to stay home and avoid contacts with others.

14. HOW CAN I PREPARE?

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of standard prevention steps for respiratory illness. Continue to practice those. Increase frequency of handwashing, make sure you are cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces, and stay home if you are ill. All of these are key for slowing the spread of illness. Masks are not recommended as a prevention strategy for people who are well in the general public. Medical providers have specific guidance on masks and personal protective equipment and should follow that guidance.

Take many of the same steps to prepare for an outbreak as you would to prepare for other emergencies:

- Make an emergency plan of action with your household members, relatives, and friends.

- Know your workplace's sick leave policies and whether you can work remotely.
- Decide who will pick up and watch children if schools or child cares are closed, or if children get sick.
- Have emergency supplies like nonperishable food, water, personal hygiene supplies, and medicine or other medical supplies in an accessible emergency kit – enough to last your household for at least 14 days.
- Include a list of emergency contacts as well as a list of medical conditions and medications for household members.

As the disease spreads, more public events, school, or other gatherings may be canceled. Please respect these decisions. This is known as social distancing, which helps reduce the spread of illness.

Set up a separate room in the household for someone who is sick and clean the room regularly. Clean, disposable facemasks may be useful for the individual who is sick, not for the well members of the household.

Know your neighbors or friends in the area and be ready to support each other during an emergency. Check in on those who live alone or have underlying health conditions and may need extra support. If you live alone, talk to your friends and family members about who would be available to check in on you if you become sick.

Through all of this, remember to stay calm, prepared and informed. Check reliable sources for updates and follow the advice of public health professionals.

15. WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE IMMUNOCOMPROMISED OR AT HIGHER RISK?

People who have underlying conditions or are otherwise immunocompromised are at higher risk from this illness, as well as other illnesses like the flu. Avoiding contact with ill people is crucial. As illness spreads, consider options for social distancing, such as working remotely and avoiding busy venues.

If a household member of someone who is immunocompromised is suspected of having or confirmed to have coronavirus, the CDC instructs healthcare professionals and local public health staff to assess isolation options for the COVID-19 patient outside of the home so that they are not in proximity to the immunocompromised household member.

If you do not have an ill household member but are immunocompromised, talk to your healthcare provider about what steps you should take to protect yourself. While masks are not recommended for the general public as a preventive measure, a healthcare provider may suggest that someone with a particularly vulnerable immune system wear a mask. Please follow your healthcare provider's guidance and keep in mind that masks are not the best option for everyone with a vulnerable immune system.

Now is also a good time to learn what options your healthcare provider may have for remote consultations, by phone or online. This can help you get your questions answered before going into a clinic, thereby minimizing exposure to this virus as well

as other illnesses.

People who are 60 or older, as well as people of all ages who have underlying medical conditions, are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19. Other higher risk groups include pregnant women or people with weakened immune systems.

16. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I GET SICK?

If you feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, call your health care provider before going to get care and tell them about your symptoms as well as any recent travel or contact with someone who has COVID-19. They can provide you instructions for seeking care so that you do not expose others.

There are many causes of fevers, coughs, and other respiratory symptoms. Clinics may have surgical masks patients are asked to wear while in the clinic. Please protect others and wear a mask if asked. Wash your hands. Cover your cough or sneeze. If you are ill, stay home.

17. SHOULD I STAY HOME FROM WORK OR KEEP MY KIDS HOME FROM SCHOOL?

People with symptoms such as cough, fever, and/or difficulty breathing, or who have been contacted by public health because they are a close contact of a confirmed or presumptive positive case, should stay home from work, school and other activities. Do not attend work until 72 hours after fever has resolved or 7 days after the illness began, whichever is longer.

If you have specific questions about your symptoms or care, contact your medical provider. Please call ahead before showing up to a clinic or other health care facility.

Those who have not been contacted by public health and who do not currently have symptoms or close contact with a case should assume that their exposure is no greater than other members of the general public.

We are encouraging workplaces and businesses to provide options for their employees to work from home if possible. If they cannot work from home, employees should minimize their interaction with large groups of people. We urge employers to maximize flexibility in sick leave benefits to accommodate these measures.

We are aware that there have been multiple school closures related to coronavirus concerns. A closure at your school does not mean it is unsafe. If your child is not ill and you have not been contacted by public health officials and notified that they are a close contact of a known case, your child can return to school when it reopens. Continue to monitor messages from your school district, child care facility and the Snohomish Health District for updated guidance.

18. WHY ISN'T THERE A LIST OF EXPOSURE LOCATIONS?

Coronaviruses like COVID-19 spread primarily among close contacts. They are spread through respiratory droplets when people cough or sneeze, or by touching a surface

where the virus has been and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes. This is different from an airborne virus like measles, where we would release locations of general exposure.

If a case is confirmed or presumed positive in someone at a school, workplace or other facility, there may be additional communications from the affected facility to notify students, staff and families. The Health District is coordinating with local partners on providing information and guidance.

19. IS IT SAFE TO DONATE BLOOD?

Yes! Blood supplies are running low because of worry over COVID-19. As with any other situation, people who are ill should stay home and should not go to donate blood. However, people who are well may certainly do so. You can't catch COVID-19 from donating blood. In fact, as supplies become critically low, we encourage you to donate blood.

20. IS IT SAFE TO TRAVEL INTERNATIONALLY?

Prior to any trip, be sure to check CDC travel notices at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>. Multiple countries have been listed at a level 3 warning, which means to avoid nonessential travel, or a level 2 warning to practice enhanced precautions while traveling. The list of countries with travel notices, as well as the level of a country's notice, may change quickly.

If you are ill, avoid travel. If you are planning trips, be prepared to cancel non-essential travel and monitor alerts as the situation changes.

21. IF I (OR SOMEONE I KNOW) HAS BEEN TO AN AFFECTED AREA RECENTLY, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If you traveled to a country with a travel alert related to coronavirus, or if you have been in close contact with someone who has confirmed novel coronavirus 2019 and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, you should:

- Seek medical care right away. Before you go to the doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Do not travel while sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

22. HOW IS THIS VIRUS TREATED?

The vast majority (at least 80%) of people with COVID-19 recover just with their own immune response. Treatment is supportive care for symptoms, fluid intake, and isolation/observation. About 10-20% of cases appear to have severe enough disease to require hospitalization. Those patients also receive supportive care and treatment

for complications of the infection (pneumonia, problems breathing, etc.). One experimental anti-viral treatment is being studied in China, but its effectiveness has not yet been demonstrated.

23. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Visit www.snohd.org/ncov2019, www.doh.wa.gov/coronavirus or www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html. Follow the Snohomish Health District on social media (facebook.com/SnohomishHealth, twitter.com/snohd)

A statewide hot line also has been set up at 1-800-525-0127, then press #.