



What is Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

Coronavirus disease 2019, also known as **COVID-19**, is a disease caused by a virus. This virus was first discovered in late 2019. The virus can spread from person to person very easily, which is why it has quickly spread to all countries across the world.

COVID-19 can cause a respiratory illness that has different symptoms in different people. *Most people will not get severely ill.* But if you are over the age of 60, have chronic health problems (heart or lung disease, smoke or have a history of smoking, diabetes, cancer, or high blood pressure) or have a compromised immune system, the virus can make you severely ill and require hospitalization.

How does COVID-19 spread?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spread from person to person, mainly between people who are in close contact with each other (within 6 feet). This is because the virus is in respiratory droplets that are produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus can also be spread through touching your mouth, eyes or nose after touching an object or surface that has the virus on it.

It is also possible for people who don't know they are sick, to spread the virus. We call this being a "silent spreader." Anyone can be a silent spreader of COVID-19.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19 and when do they show up?

Patients with COVID-19 can have anywhere from mild to severe symptoms, which usually are:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing or feeling short of breath
- Feeling very tired
- Muscle aches
- A loss of taste or smell

Symptoms can take anywhere from 2 days to 2 weeks to first show up after a person has been exposed to the virus. On average, symptoms start about 5 days after a person is infected with the virus.

How ill can Coronavirus make me?

For most people, the virus will not cause severe illness and they will recover in a few weeks. But for others, especially the elderly and those with chronic health conditions, the virus can cause pneumonia, difficulty getting oxygen to the body, heart problems, and in some cases, death.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to the virus or may have the virus?

If you believe you have been exposed to the virus or might be ill with the virus, make sure you stay home and call your doctor or primary healthcare provider right away. If you do not have a doctor or primary healthcare provider, then please call the **SIU Medicine COVID-19 HOTLINE at (217) 545-5100.**



If you are having any symptoms that are severe, such as trouble breathing (shortness of breath), chest pain, blue lips or confusion, **you must seek medical care immediately**. Call 911 if you are having a medical emergency and tell the operator all of your symptoms. Put on a facemask or face covering (such as a scarf or bandana) if you are going to the emergency room or are waiting for medical help to arrive.

How can I protect myself from getting COVID-19?

Handwashing is your first line of defense. It is important to wash your hands frequently and thoroughly. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in any public place, coughed, sneezed or if you have touched your eyes, nose or mouth. Make sure to wash all surfaces of your hands, fingers, and thumbs.

Another important way to protect yourself from getting the virus or from spreading the virus to others is **stay home**, except to get medical care and essential supplies such as food and medicine. This is called “**social distancing**” or “**physical distancing**.” The more that our community practices distancing, the less likely the virus will spread through our community and get people sick.

Do not leave your home except to do essential work, get food or necessary supplies, or to get medical care. Distancing means you do not leave your home to go to gatherings, public places such as parks and basketball courts, or to other people’s homes. Stay connected with your friends and family over phone calls so that you can support each other through this time.

Other important ways to protect yourself and others are:

- If you do not have soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and rub in well until your hands feel dry
- Keep 6 feet of distance between you and other people
- Avoid close contact with anyone who is sick
- Do not touch your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Always cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, throw the tissue away and wash your hands for 20 seconds.
- Wear a mask or other face-covering that covers your nose and mouth if you need to go out in public. A scarf or bandana will also work.

What are some myths about COVID-19?

Misinformation about the pandemic is spreading almost as rapidly as the disease itself. Please share only the facts when you’re communicating with others.

- **MYTH: Black people do not get Coronavirus.** FACT: African Americans are at higher risk of infection.
- **MYTH: Only older adults are at risk.** FACT: Adults of all ages can get COVID-19.
- **MYTH: Children cannot get Coronavirus.** FACT: Kids can get COVID-19, but they often have mild illness.
- **MYTH: Coronavirus is just like the flu.** FACT: It is a different virus and can spread more easily than the flu.
- **MYTH: Gloves protect you.** FACT: Gloves can become contaminated! Most important to wash hands.
- **MYTH: If you can hold your breath for 10 seconds you do not have it.** FACT: This does not work or help.
- **MYTH: Gargling will protect you.** FACT: This will not protect you or help you.

If my skin is overly dry from handwashing, what can I do?

After handwashing, you can apply an unscented hand cream or lotion to your skin. Creams are thicker than lotions and work better for drier skin. It is best to use something that is fragrance-free. Most drug store brands work well (Cetaphil, Neutrogena, Aveeno, Okeefe’s Working Hands). Even plain Vaseline petroleum jelly or Crisco works well!

**IF YOU ARE CONCERNED YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER MAY HAVE CORONAVIRUS,
PLEASE CALL THE SIU COVID-19 HOTLINE AT 217-545-5100**