



# Chester County Health Department

## Coronavirus COVID-19

### Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: July 13, 2020

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#### **Introduction**

The Chester County Health Department, supporting COVID-19 response in both Chester County and Delaware County, is actively protecting the health of our residents. Following our recommendations will slow the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the number of people infected.

This guidance is updated as the situation changes.

#### **How does COVID-19 spread?**

The virus is thought to spread mainly from people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).

It is passed through respiratory droplets made when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or can be inhaled into the lungs. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

Close contact is defined as:

- being within approximately 6 feet (2 meters) of a COVID-19 case for at least 15 minutes; close contact can occur while caring for, living with, visiting, or sharing a waiting area or room with a COVID-19 case

– OR –

- having direct contact with infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case (e.g., being coughed on)

#### **What is community spread?**

Community spread means that people in the community are testing positive for COVID-19 and they are unsure of how or where they may have become infected (they do not have known contact with a confirmed case).

Even as community spread decreases, everyone should continue to follow Governor Wolf's phase-specific guidance. During the Green Phase, continue to practice physical distancing, hand hygiene, wearing a mask in public, and limiting contact with groups of people.



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#### **Can someone spread the virus without being sick?**

Yes. People are thought to be most contagious when they are showing signs and symptoms (symptomatic). However, individuals without symptoms can transmit the virus to others. This includes people who have coronavirus but no symptoms ("asymptomatic") or people who have coronavirus and do not have symptoms yet ("pre-symptomatic"). That means the virus can spread between people who are nearby, through speaking, coughing, or sneezing, even if those people have no symptoms.

#### **What is physical (social) distancing?**

Physical or social distancing means to reduce close physical contact between people to stop or slow the spread of disease. Physical distancing may include:

- keeping at least six feet distance between you and others
- postponing group events, gatherings, play dates, and sleepovers
- limiting errands and travel

Physical distancing does not mean you cannot socialize with others! You can call or use technology to stay connected. When you meet in person, you can stay 6 feet apart and limit the size of the group.

#### **Can I travel or go on vacation?**

If you have traveled, or plan to travel, to an area where there are high amounts of COVID-19 cases, it is recommended that you stay at home for 14 days upon return to Pennsylvania. For full Pennsylvania advisory, including links to the CDC and U.S. State Department, click here:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Travelers.aspx>

CDC recommends staying at home as much as possible and avoid close contact, especially if you are at higher risk of severe illness. If you must travel, there are several things you should consider before you go.

- Review Pennsylvania travel guidance before traveling.
- Review the state/municipality guidance for the location where you are traveling.
- Review your employer/school/childcare guidance before traveling.
- Research case counts for the state/municipality for the location where you are traveling and assess potential risks.
- Bring hand sanitizer and/or sanitizing wipes.
- Bring necessary supplies in order to limit your contact with others or time in public.



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#### **Why do I need to wear a facemask?**

Since people with no symptoms can spread the virus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends wearing cloth/fabric face coverings in public settings. A face covering helps keep your germs to yourself. When everyone wears a mask, we decrease the germs that are spread to others.

Additionally, please follow all Pennsylvania Department of Health guidance related to universal face coverings:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guidance/Universal-Masking-FAQ.aspx>

#### **Why do I have to wear a mask if I am staying 6 feet from other people? Why do I have to stay 6 feet from other people if I am wearing a mask?**

A car has brakes, seat belts, airbags, and other safety features that all add up to help protect you. We also require drivers to get a license and don't let them use substances before driving that will make driving unsafe. In the same way, each of the public health measures we use to respond to a pandemic helps a little bit. We sometimes need to temporarily stop some types of activities or close some locations. We need to wash our hands and wear masks. We should keep physically distant from other people as much as possible. We should all think before traveling about whether the risk is worth it. No one thing will perfectly protect everyone from getting sick. But when we all do our part, we can decrease infections in the community.

#### **Am I safe to resume normal activities if I am wearing a mask?**

No, it is not safe to resume normal activities. The mask is intended for you to keep your germs to yourself. The mask will not protect you from someone else's germs. It is important to continue following all other public health recommendations, such as physical distancing.

#### **How do I make a homemade mask?**

You can use fabric or cloth to make homemade masks. The masks should fit snug to the bridge of your nose. Make it out of two or three layers of tightly woven 100% cotton fabric.

For additional guidance, review resources on this page:

<https://www.chesco.org/4437/Coronavirus-COVID-19-How-to-Help>

#### **When and how do I clean my fabric mask?**



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Masks should be washed after every use, using hot water and regular detergent. Ensure it is completely dry before using it again.

#### **Do we have to wear facemasks 24/7?**

No. You should wear a facemask when going out in public places and in accordance with PA DOH guidance.

If someone in your household is sick with COVID-19 or has been exposed to COVID-19, everyone should wear a facemask and maintain as much distance as possible from person who is sick.

#### **Do I have to put masks on my young kids?**

If your child is able to tolerate wearing a mask, it is recommended to put a mask on the child when going to public places.

Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children younger than 2 years of age, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance.

#### **I had/was exposed to COVID-19 and am still in isolation/quarantine. Can I go back to work with a mask?**

You cannot go back to work until you have finished your isolation/quarantine period as outlined in the "Screening Guide for Businesses" guidance on the following website:

<https://www.chesco.org/4398/Coronavirus---Resources-for-Businesses>

Please contact your employer before returning to work.

#### **How long does the virus live on surfaces?**

Current evidence suggests that novel coronavirus may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials.

The CDC reports it may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

#### **Who is affected most by COVID-19 in PA?**



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The case counts across the US are rapidly changing. Visit the PA Department of Health's website for the most up to date data on Coronavirus cases in PA.

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

#### **What should I do if I have any chronic health conditions, weakened immune system, or if I am older?**

Individuals with chronic health conditions, weakened immune systems, or are age 65 years and older are at higher risk for COVID-19. The Chester County Health Department recommends these individuals should limit trips outside the home, and stay away from large groups of people as much as possible, even in the green phase. This includes avoiding or limiting visits to places where there may be close contact with others, such as bars, restaurants, religious services, gyms, theaters, shopping malls, and parties or other social gatherings. You should also follow all other recommendations, like physical distancing, hand hygiene, and mask wearing. Consider the full risk before you decide to have contact with others, such as the list found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>. Consult your healthcare provider to discuss what kind of face mask is needed for your protection, and for advice on activities.

#### **Should I be tested for COVID-19?**

Testing is recommended for anyone with symptoms. Testing may also be advised for those with exposure to someone with COVID-19, or for screening in certain situations. Your healthcare provider can help determine whether you should be tested.

#### **Where do I get tested for COVID-19?**

The Health Department is currently offering nasal swab (PCR) diagnostic testing. Many pharmacies are offering testing, and some laboratories offer in-home testing through the mail.

You may also consult with your healthcare provider to determine whether you should be tested. If they determine that you need to be tested, they can refer you to a testing location.

- Learn more about testing in Chester County here:  
<https://www.chesco.org/4460/Coronavirus-COVID-19-Testing-Information>
- Learn more about testing in Delaware County here:  
<http://delcopa.gov/ich/resources/covid19/testing.html>

If you are not sick enough to need emergency medical treatment, you should not go to the emergency room.



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#### **I was tested. How do I get my test results?**

Please follow up with the healthcare provider who performed the test. You can identify who this provider is by looking at the lab slip.

The Health Department cannot look up results for tests administered by anyone other than the Health Department. If your test is positive, the Health Department will be in contact with you via phone.

#### **I might have come in contact with someone who has COVID-19. What is my risk and what should I do?**

Everyone with close contact should quarantine for 14 days from the date of last contact. If you live with the person with COVID-19, your 14 days does not start until that person is no longer contagious, so the total amount of time you will need to stay at home will be longer than 14 days. Close contact is within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more, or direct contact with liquids from an infected person's body, such as coughs or sneezes. After you have been exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19, it can take up to 14 days for illness to start (the incubation period).

During the incubation period, a COVID-19 test will be negative even if you are developing the illness. For this reason, you must stay in quarantine for 14 days even if you have a negative COVID-19 test. If you start having symptoms during the 14 days, you should have a PCR test.

#### **I am a healthcare worker and there was a patient with COVID-19 at my facility. What should I do?**

Contact your occupational health or infection control practitioner to determine whether your exposure is considered higher or lower risk. This will depend on what personal protective equipment (PPE) was worn by the patient and the healthcare worker, and what procedures were being performed. Depending on the level of exposure, you may need to quarantine for 14 days. For details, please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html> or ask your employer.

#### **What's the difference between self-monitoring, quarantine, and isolation?**

**Self-monitoring** – people are monitoring themselves for fever by taking their temperatures twice a day, and remaining alert for cough, difficulty breathing, or other COVID-19 symptoms. If they feel feverish or develop symptoms during the self-monitoring period, they should self-isolate and limit contact with others. They should call their healthcare provider, occupational health, or their local health department to determine whether medical evaluation is needed.





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**Quarantine** – Staying away from other people after you have been exposed to COVID-19. People in quarantine have no symptoms but stay home for 14 days to see if they become sick. For COVID-19, quarantine is 14 days because that is how long it takes after exposure for people to become infected. Quarantine can limit community exposure. Quarantine is especially important because people with COVID-19 can have no symptoms and might not know they are contagious.

**Isolation** – Staying away from other people when you are sick. For COVID-19, people usually stop being contagious after about 10 days (see below). Isolation helps avoid spreading illness.

#### When can I stop quarantine or isolation?

##### 1. For people with COVID-19 under home isolation:

Those with symptoms may stop home isolation under the following conditions:

- At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since fever went away without the use of fever-reducing medication
- **AND** improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath)
- **AND** At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

Those without symptoms may stop home isolation 10 days after the PCR test was collected.

##### 2. For healthcare personnel (HCP) with COVID-19 under home isolation:

Follow the above guidance. In addition, after returning to work, HCP should:

- Wear a facemask for source control at all times while in the healthcare facility until all symptoms are completely resolved or at baseline.
  - A facemask instead of a cloth face covering should be used by these HCP for source control during this time period while in the facility.
  - A facemask for source control does not replace the need to wear an N95 or higher-level respirator (or other recommended PPE) when indicated, including when caring for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.
    - Of note, N95 or other respirators with an exhaust valve may not provide source control.
- Self-monitor for symptoms, and seek re-evaluation from occupational health if respiratory symptoms recur or worsen.
- Be restricted from contact with severely immunocompromised patients (e.g. transplant, hematology-oncology) until 14 days after illness onset.



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3. **For Household Contacts of Persons with COVID-19:**

Because exposure is considered to be ongoing within the house, household contacts of persons with COVID-19 must be quarantined for 14 days after the person who tested positive has been released from isolation (see #1 above). This means that household contacts will need to remain at home longer than the person who tested positive.

4. **For Non-Household Contacts of Persons with COVID-19:**

People who had close contact with a person with COVID-19 must be quarantined for 14 days from the date of last contact with the person with COVID-19.

#### **What is contact tracing?**

Contact tracing is the process of finding out who has recently been in close contact with a person infected with COVID-19. We reach out to those contacts to tell them they may have been exposed, without telling them the name of the person. We provide information and support for them on what to do after the exposure. It's a public health strategy that's been used for years to decrease the spread of contagious diseases.

#### **What if I have a question about schools, businesses, travel, community gatherings or events?**

Visit <https://www.pa.gov/guides/responding-to-covid-19> to review Governor Wolf's guidance for businesses, schools, and care facilities and other industries.

#### **How do I report non-compliant businesses?**

The Chester County Health Department can only enforce food-related establishments. To report non-compliant food-establishments, visit the Chester County Health Department's website and click on the "Report Non-Compliant Food Establishments". [www.chesco.org/coronavirus](http://www.chesco.org/coronavirus)

To report businesses other than food-establishments, contact your local law enforcement agency's non-emergency number.

#### **What should my business/organization do about cleaning?**

Up to date and sector-specific cleaning can be found at the CDC's website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html> When choosing cleaning products, consider the environment in addition to how well the product



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works against COVID-19. Remember to minimize the exposure of your staff to cleaning chemicals.

#### **How can I volunteer?**

We do not take spontaneous volunteers to assist in an emergency. Chester County has several volunteer channels where we pre-train our volunteers, and ensure they have the specific skills needed for our mission.

- Please check with local organizations whose mission speaks to you. Local non-profit organizations are a great place to start.
- American Red Cross is facing a severe blood shortage; please check [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) to donate blood.
- If you are interested in assisting with Health Operations, sign up for the Chester County Medical Reserve Corps. [www.chesco.org/mrc](http://www.chesco.org/mrc)
  - Medical Reserve Corps volunteers are a professional group of medically and non-medically trained volunteers that augment our public health resources in the County. Being a part of the MRC is an on-going commitment.

#### **What can I do to help protect myself and the community?**

- Wear a mask in public.
- Limit travel, even in the green phase.
- Limit contact with groups of people, even in the green phase.
- Whenever possible, stay at least 6 feet apart from people who are not in your household.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick where possible. If you are caring for someone who is sick, try to wear a mask and have that person wear a mask.
- Cover your cough/sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If you cannot wash your hands, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Wash your hands after touching objects that other people may frequently touch, such as remotes, phones, door knobs, or money.

Please visit the Health Department website for more information at:

<https://chesco.org/coronavirus>



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