



COVID-19

Stay Safe While You're in the Hospital

THE BASICS

COVID-19, sometimes called the coronavirus, is **a respiratory virus that spreads very easily from person to person**. There are many types of human coronaviruses, including some that cause mild upper-respiratory tract illnesses and others that cause more severe symptoms. COVID-19 is a new disease, caused by a coronavirus that has not been seen in humans before. It causes mild symptoms in some people and severe symptoms or even death in others. Because COVID-19 has spread all over the world, it is now considered a pandemic.

KNOW THE SIGNS

Symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- fever
- shortness of breath
- aches and pains
- dry cough
- fatigue
- sore throat

For most healthy people, there's a low risk of COVID-19 becoming severe. But in adults over 65 and people with underlying health problems—such as diabetes, heart disease or lung disease—COVID-19 can lead to pneumonia, organ failure or even death. ▶



You're more likely to get COVID-19 if you've been in close contact with another person who has had the illness, or if you live in—or have recently traveled from—an area where ongoing community spread of the virus has been reported. Healthcare workers are also at a higher risk of getting COVID-19.

REDUCE YOUR RISK

Take these steps to **lower your chance of getting COVID-19** during your hospital stay:

- Frequently **wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds**. Be sure to wash your hands before eating, after using the bathroom and after touching objects that others may have touched. If you need to wash your hands but can't get to the bathroom on your own, use your nurse call button to ask for help.
- **Sanitize your hands with alcohol-based gel**. Have hand sanitizer placed near your bed so you can clean your hands throughout the day. Make sure the gel contains at least 60% alcohol.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** with your elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw tissues out immediately, then wash your hands.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth** with unwashed hands.
- Make sure your nurse or housekeeping **cleans and disinfects frequently touched surfaces**, such as bed rails, remote controls and doorknobs.
- **Have visitors take special steps to keep you and themselves safe**. Make sure visitors clean their hands every time they enter your room. And for extra safety, ask visitors not to touch you. Keeping physical space—about 6 feet—between you and others is a helpful way to prevent the spread of germs like COVID-19.





SPEAK UP FOR CLEAN HANDS

Hospital staff should clean their hands every time they enter your room and after they remove their gloves. They may use soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer, rubbing for 20 seconds.

It's okay to ask staff members if they have cleaned their hands. You can ask questions like:

- "I didn't see you clean your hands when you came in. Would you mind cleaning them again before you examine me?"
- "I'm worried about germs spreading in the hospital. Will you please clean your hands again before you start my treatment?"

Also remember to ask visitors to clean their hands every time they enter your room.



ANSWER HONESTLY

Hospital staff may frequently ask if you have certain symptoms, like a cough or shortness of breath. Answer these questions honestly. And if you start to have new symptoms, let your doctor or nurse know as soon as possible.

It's important for staff to know how you're feeling so they can take the right steps to keep you and others safe.



DO YOU NEED A FACEMASK?

Unless you are at the hospital for breathing problems or a cough, you probably don't need to wear a facemask. Facemasks help limit the spread of germs from people who are sick with a respiratory virus like COVID-19. If you don't have a respiratory virus, then you don't need to wear a facemask to protect yourself.

Remember to tell healthcare staff right away if you start to have a cough or shortness of breath. Your doctor will decide if you need to wear a facemask.



FOLLOW VISITATION RULES

Because of COVID-19, hospitals may change their visitation policies for some or all areas of the facility. Look for special signs posted in the hospital about new policies. If you aren't sure about the visiting rules for your unit, ask your nurse. And please tell your loved ones to follow these rules.

As a patient, you might feel sad or frustrated about new visiting policies. But these rules are important to follow to protect patients, staff and your loved ones from infection. To keep in touch with loved ones during your stay, instead try a daily phone call or video chat.

TRUSTED SOURCES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)
- World Health Organization: [who.int](https://www.who.int)
- National Institutes of Health: [nih.gov](https://www.nih.gov)