

Coronavirus (COVID-19): General advice

Overview

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is the illness caused by a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan city, China. It can cause a cough and/or a fever/high temperature.

Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people and those with long term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

This is a rapidly changing situation which is being monitored carefully.

Symptoms of a COVID-19 infection

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are a new continuous cough and/or a fever/high temperature (37.8C or greater).

A new continuous cough is where you:

- have a new cough that's lasted for an hour
- have had 3 or more episodes of coughing in 24 hours
- are coughing more than usual

A high temperature is feeling hot to the touch on your chest or back (you don't need to measure your temperature). You may feel warm, cold or shivery.

Some people will have more serious symptoms, including pneumonia or difficulty breathing, which might require admission to hospital.

Could I have coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Use this guide to find out what to do next if you have developed any of these symptoms and are worried about coronavirus.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Before using this guide

If you're asking on behalf of someone else, please make sure the person is:

- conscious and alert
- responding normally to you

If not, phone 999 and ask for an ambulance and tell them that you're concerned about coronavirus.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19

If you've developed a new continuous cough and/or a fever/high temperature in the last 7 days, stay at home for 7 days from the start of your symptoms even if you think your symptoms are mild. Do not go to your GP, pharmacy or hospital.

Phone 111 if your symptoms:

- have not improved after 7 days
- are severe or you have shortness of breath
- worsen during home isolation

You should also phone 111 if you develop breathlessness or it worsens, especially if you:

- are 70 years old or over
- have underlying poor health
- have heart or lung problems
- have a weakened immune system, including cancer
- have diabetes

If you have a medical emergency, phone 999 and tell them you have COVID-19 symptoms.

[Caring for a cough at home \(/illnesses-and-conditions/lungs-and-airways/cough/\)](#)

[Caring for a fever at home \(/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/fever-in-adults/\)](#)

Do the people I live with need to take any action?

If you live with other people and have symptoms, they'll need to stay at home for 14 days from the start of your symptoms even if they don't have symptoms themselves.

If they develop symptoms within the 14 days, they need to stay at home for 7 days from the day their symptoms began. They should do this even if it takes them over the 14-day isolation period.

[Advice for people staying at home \(self-isolating\) \(/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-stay-at-home-advice/\)](#)

Get an isolation note to give to your employer

You can send an isolation note to your employer as proof you need to stay off work because of COVID-19.

You don't need to get a note from a GP.

Get an isolation note (<http://www.111.nhs.uk/isolation-note>)

Can't get an isolation note

You need to contact your employer if you require to shield from COVID-19 due to underlying conditions but are currently well. Please don't phone 111 or your GP.

Is there anything I can do to prepare?

You should start planning now for how you would manage a period of self-isolation just in case everyone in your household needs to stay at home.

Your plan might include:

talking to your neighbours and family and exchanging phone numbers of household contacts

making a plan for those in your home who are considered vulnerable.

creating a contact list with phone numbers of neighbours, schools, employer, pharmacist and your GP

setting up online shopping accounts if possible

Testing for COVID-19

Generally, you'll only be tested for COVID-19 if you have a serious illness that requires admission to hospital.

How COVID-19 is spread

Because it's a new illness, we don't know exactly how the virus spreads from person to person. Similar viruses spread by droplets in coughs and sneezes.

How to avoid catching COVID-19

You can reduce your risk of getting and spreading the infection by:

avoiding direct hand contact with your eyes, nose and mouth

maintaining good hand hygiene

avoiding direct contact with people that have a respiratory illness and avoiding using their personal items such as their mobile phone

covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing with disposable tissues and disposing of them in the nearest waste bin after use

Wash your hands regularly

Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol hand sanitiser before eating and drinking, and after coughing, sneezing and going to the toilet.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9hCY-MldMA>

Treating COVID-19

Currently, there's no vaccine and no specific treatment for the virus.

Ibuprofen

There is currently no strong evidence that ibuprofen can make coronavirus (COVID-19) worse.

But until we have more information, take paracetamol to treat the symptoms of coronavirus, unless your doctor has told you paracetamol is not suitable for you.

If you are already taking ibuprofen or another non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) on the advice of a doctor, do not stop taking it without checking first.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) helpline

If you don't have symptoms and are looking for general information, phone our free helpline on 0800 028 2816 (tel:0800%20028 2816) .

The helpline is open from 8.00am to 10.00pm each day.

Other languages and formats

Our coronavirus (COVID-19) information is also available in British Sign Language (BSL) (</translations/languages/british-sign-language-bsl/illnesses-and-conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>) and Easy Read (</translations/formats/easy-read/coronavirus-covid-19/>) .

Further information

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Check your symptoms \(/self-help-guides/self-help-guide-coronavirus-covid-19/\)](/self-help-guides/self-help-guide-coronavirus-covid-19/)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Stay at home advice \(/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-stay-at-home-advice/\)](/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-stay-at-home-advice/)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Social distancing (</illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-social-distancing/>)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Shielding (</illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-shielding/>)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Advice for professionals (</illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-professionals/>)

On other websites

Fit for Travel: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) (<https://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/advice/disease-prevention-advice/novel-coronavirus-wuhan-china-infection>)

Scottish Government: Coronavirus in Scotland (<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>)

Ready Scotland: Coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.readyscotland.org/coronavirus>)

Common questions

Is there a risk of passing on infection through shared use of or contact with towels or bed linen used by a person who develops COVID-19?

You should wash clothes, towels and bed linen that has been used by someone with symptoms at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric. Follow the instructions on the manufacturer's label.

Anyone with symptoms of respiratory illness should:

- use their own towels and bed linen

- wash these separately from other people living in the household

- Don't shake dirty laundry as this can spread the virus through the air.

I have heard that someone who attends my workplace/my child's school has COVID-19. What should I do?

You don't need to take any specific actions as long as you and your child remain well.

If you develop a fever or new continuous cough, follow our advice for staying at home. Phone 111 if you or your child has severe symptoms.

How soon after contact with COVID-19 do people become unwell?

Because this is a new virus, we don't know how long it takes for people to become unwell. Similar viruses suggest symptoms develop within a few days of exposure.

How long can COVID-19 survive outside the body?

COVID-19 is a new and emerging virus so there hasn't been any studies on how long it might survive outside the body. Other coronaviruses survive on hard surfaces for at least 48 hours, so proper cleaning's very important.

Is my pet at risk from COVID-19?

There's currently no evidence that companion animals or pets can be infected with the COVID-19.

It's always a good idea to wash your hands with soap and water after contact with pets. This can help to protect you and your pet against common infections that can pass between pets and humans.

I am a carer, what will happen if I need to stay at home?

If you're a carer and need to stay at home, you should discuss the needs of the person you care for with your health protection team, social worker or primary care team. They'll assess the risk to the health of the person you care for to find out what support they'll need while you're isolated.

You should also:

Speak with your family and friends about who could take over your caring role if you become unwell or need to self-isolate - just in case local services can't provide support have key information about the person you care for easily available so that anyone taking over care has all the information they need

If you or your friends and family are unable to care for someone, contact your local social work department (PDF, 198KB) (<https://socialworkscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Social-Work-Departments-Contact-Information-Website-version.pdf>) for help.

What about my home visits from health and social care staff?

If you need a home visit while you're self-isolating, tell your care provider in advance that you're following our stay at home advice so they can follow the appropriate guidance.

What effect does COVID-19 have if someone is pregnant?

As this is a new virus, how it affects someone who is pregnant isn't yet clear. You should carefully follow our social distancing guidance to be safe.

We expect that a large majority of people who are pregnant will only experience mild or moderate cold or flu-like symptoms.

People who are pregnant don't appear to be more susceptible to the consequences of COVID-19 than the general population.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has more detailed guidance about COVID-19 for people who are pregnant (<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/>)

I have a condition or take medicines that suppress my immunity. Do I need to take any special precautions if someone in my household is self-isolating or I have symptoms myself?

You should speak to a health professional if you:

take medicines that suppress your immune system, for example medicines you take after a transplant

are having other treatment that might make you more vulnerable to infections, for example cancer or steroid treatment

People with weakened immune systems can show different signs of COVID-19 infection. Speak to your lead clinician or phone 111 if you're concerned about any new symptoms.

You should carefully [follow our social distancing guidance](#) to be safe.

How should I clean surfaces in my home if someone has been unwell with a cough, cold or other respiratory illness?

Many readily available household cleaners will kill viruses and bacteria. You can either use a:

combined detergent/disinfectant solution

neutral general purpose detergent followed by disinfection

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for dilution and any guidance on application and contact times for all detergents and disinfectants.

Always wash your hands after cleaning. Wash or dispose of cleaning cloths as usual.

Will wearing a mask help to prevent spreading the virus?

There's not enough evidence to suggest using a face mask helps to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Is it safe to drink from water fountains?

In general, you shouldn't drink directly from the spout of a water fountain.

If the spout is a suitable design you can fill cups and water bottles. Spouts with 'swan neck' designs are most suitable for this.

You should avoid contact between the spout and your lips, or between the spout and the cup/container being filled.



Source: NHS Scotland

Last updated:
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