

How COVID-19 Spreads

Person-to-Person Transmission

Experts believe the virus that causes COVID-19 spreads mainly from person to person. There are several ways that this can happen:

- **Droplets:** When an infected person coughs or sneezes, droplets with the virus fly from their nose or mouth into the air. Anyone who is within 6 feet of that person can breathe those droplets into their lungs.
- **Airborne Transmission:** Research shows that the virus can stay alive in the air for up to 3 hours. When you breathe air that has the virus floating in it, it gets into your lungs.
- **Fecal-Oral:** Studies also suggest that virus particles can be found in infected people's poop. But it still isn't known if the infection can spread through contact with an infected person's poop. If that person uses the bathroom and doesn't wash their hands, they could infect things and people that they touch.
- **Surface Transmission:** Another way to catch the new coronavirus is if you touch surfaces that someone with the virus has coughed or sneezed on. You may touch a countertop or doorknob that's contaminated and then touch your nose, mouth, or eyes. The virus can live on surfaces like plastic and stainless steel for 2 to 3 days. To prevent the spread, clean and disinfect all counters, knobs, and other surfaces you and your family touch several times a day.

The virus most often spreads through people who have symptoms. But it may be possible to spread the virus and not show any signs. Some people who don't know they've been infected can pass it to others.

- People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).
- Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms; there have been reports of this occurring with this new coronavirus, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

Community Spread is when people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected, or when someone gets the virus without any known contact with a known sick person.

Sometimes a person can trace how they got the virus because they will know they have been in contact with someone who is sick. In other cases, the cause is unknown.

Spread from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects

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.

How easily the virus spreads

How easily a virus spreads from person-to-person can vary. Some viruses are highly contagious (spread easily), like measles, while other viruses do not spread as easily. Another factor is whether the spread is sustained, spreading continually without stopping.

The virus that causes COVID-19 seems to be spreading easily and sustainably in the community ("community spread") in some affected geographic areas.

