

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COVID-19 COMMUNITY SPREAD

The Houston Health Department is taking proactive steps to protect the health of our community by making recommendations that are meant to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and reduce the number of people infected.

We know our recommendations will have a major impact on the lives of Houstonians, but we are making them in order to best protect the health of our community. The possibility of community spread of COVID-19 in Houston is a significant escalation of the situation and requires all of us to be more vigilant to help reduce our risk of exposure.

These steps are recommended until further notice. We are continually re-evaluating.

Guidance for people at higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness

People at higher risk of severe illness should stay home and away from large groups of people as much as possible, including public places with lots of people and large gatherings where there will be close contact with others. People at higher risk include:

- People 60 and older.
- People with underlying health conditions including heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes.
- People who have weakened immune systems.
- People who are pregnant.

Caregivers of children with underlying health conditions should consult with healthcare providers about whether their children should stay home. Anyone who has questions about whether their condition puts them at risk for novel coronavirus should consult with their healthcare providers.

Guidance for workplaces and businesses

Employers should take steps to make it more feasible for their employees to work in ways that minimize close contact with large numbers of people.

Employers should:

- Maximize telecommuting options for as many employees as possible.
- Urge employees to stay home when they are sick and maximize flexibility in sick leave benefits.
- Consider staggering start and end times to reduce large numbers of people coming together at the same time



Event and community gathering considerations

If you can feasibly avoid bringing large groups of people together, consider postponing events and gatherings.

If you can't avoid bringing groups of people together:

- Urge anyone who is sick to not attend.
- Encourage those who are at higher risk for coronavirus to not attend.
- Ensure an adequate supply of hand soap and disinfectants.
- Consider providing hand sanitizing stations.
- Boost the frequency of cleaning and restocking of soap and paper towels in restrooms
- Increase the frequency of sanitizing common touchpoints Try to find ways to give people more physical space so that they aren't in close contact as much as possible.
- Encourage attendees to maintain good healthy habits, such as frequent hand washing.

Guidance for schools

The Houston Health Department is currently not recommending closing schools. If a case of COVID-19 is diagnosed at a school, the health department will work with the school and the district to determine the best measures including potential closure of the school.

The reason we are not recommending school closures at this time is because children have not been shown to be a high-risk group for serious illness from this virus. In addition, when some schools briefly closed during the H1N1 influenza pandemic, we learned that many children still gathered in group settings and still had exposure to one another. As much as possible, children should be allowed to carry on with their education and normal activities.

The Houston Health Department also respects individual schools' decisions about closures or postponement of activities as each school knows the needs of their community best.

Some children have underlying health conditions, such as weakened immune systems, that put them at higher risk. Caregivers of children with underlying health conditions should consult with healthcare providers about whether their children should stay home.

For people who are sick

Stay home when you are sick. Do not go out in public when you are sick. Avoid medical settings in general unless necessary. If you are ill in any way call your doctor's office first before going in.



For general public

- Even if you are not ill, avoid visiting hospitals, long term care facilities or nursing homes to the extent possible. If you do need to visit one of these facilities limit your time there and keep six feet away from patients.
- **Do not go to the emergency room unless it's a medical emergency.** Emergency rooms need to be able to serve those with the most critical needs.
- If you have symptoms like cough, fever, or other respiratory problems, contact a healthcare professional. You must call ahead before going.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizer when you can't wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue and throw the tissue away. If you don't have a tissue, use the elbow of your sleeve. Don't use your hands to cover coughs and sneezes.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, especially if you are at higher risk for coronavirus.
- Get plenty of rest, drink plenty of fluids, eat healthy foods, and manage your stress to keep your immunity strong.
- Stay informed. Information is changing frequently. Visit HoustonEmergency.org frequently for updates.

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