

## COVID-19 Key Messages

Updated: November 2, 2020

### Current Situation

- Houston’s COVID-19 positivity rate, daily new cases, and hospitalizations increased for the first time since the summer surge.
- This is concerning, especially as we enter the holiday season when people spend more time indoors and traditionally gather with family and friends.
- We have the power and responsibility to work together to keep businesses and schools open and protect vulnerable populations.
- Mask up, social distance, wash hands, and get tested. Don’t stop. Don’t forget.

### Preventative Behaviors

- To protect each other, we need to do these simple things as outlined in the “Better. Together.” campaign:
  - **Mask up** by wearing a face covering over your mouth and nose
  - **Social distance** at least six feet from other people and avoiding gatherings
  - **Wash hands** frequently with soap and water for at least 20-seconds
  - **Get tested** and isolate if you’re positive.
- Make these habits part of your daily routine.
- Don’t stop. Don’t forget.
- Until a vaccine is widely available, these are our best tools to slow the spread.

### Getting Tested

- Getting tested empowers you to protect your family, friends and community.
- Testing provides public health professionals the opportunity to conduct contact tracing and break chains of transmission.
- Getting tested at Houston Health Department-affiliated sites is **free, fast and safe**.
- Wait times are minimal and labs report results, on average, in 2-4 days.
- Getting tested at HHD-affiliated sites does not require proof of residency, citizenship or insurance.
- COVID-19 services will not be factored against immigrants in their public charge evaluation.
- For the safety of those around you, if you have symptoms and are awaiting test results, you should act as if you have the virus by isolating at home.
- If you test positive, to protect your loved ones, isolate yourself and let those with whom you had close prolonged contact know about your positive test.

### Flu Season

- Flu season is different this year because of COVID-19.



- People can get the flu and COVID-19 at the same time, which is especially dangerous for the elderly and people with underlying health conditions.
- Hospital occupancy increases each flu season, which will strain hospital's ability to care for COVID-19 patients.
- While there is not currently a vaccine for COVID-19, **there is a flu vaccine.**
- Now is the time for everyone six months and older to get a flu shot.
- It's our responsibility to help protect the old and young in our communities.
- The vaccine is available at most pharmacies, grocery stores, doctor's offices and clinics.
- The Houston Health Department offers the vaccine on a sliding fee scale by appointment at its health centers. Call 3-1-1 to find a center near you.

### Holiday Safety

- If you may have COVID-19 or may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, do not participate any in-person holiday activities.
- Avoid in-person gatherings with people outside of your household.
- If you attend a gathering with people who don't live in your home, consider avoiding contact with non-household members for 14 days before and after the gathering.
- Holiday dinner at home with people who live in the same household is low risk.
- Outdoor activities are safer than indoor activities, but everyone should still wear a mask and stay six feet apart.
- Wear a mask and social distance when in public and around people who are not household members. If you can't frequently wash your hands, use hand sanitizer.
- Order groceries online and take advantage of curbside pick-up instead of spending time inside the store.
- Avoid shopping in crowded stores, especially on Black Friday. Consider taking advantage of online shopping.
- If you must shop in a store, go when it's less crowded, wear a mask and social distance.

### Contact Tracing

- Making a choice to work with contact tracers helps protect your family and your community by slowing the spread of COVID-19.
- If you test positive for COVID-19, a contact tracer from your local health department will contact you by phone, email or text message.
- The contact tracer will check-in on your health, discuss with whom you've been in close contact and ask you to stay at home to self-isolate.
- The contact tracer then contacts the people with whom you had close contact to ask if they have symptoms and offer guidance about testing and quarantine.
- Your name will not be given to those you identify as close contacts.



- Information gathered through contact tracing is not used for any other purpose.
- It's important to be forthcoming with the contact tracer as the information is vital to stopping the spread of disease.
- Contact tracers will never ask for your social security, bank or credit card information.
- When you receive an initial call from a contact tracer at the Houston Health Department, the number displayed will be 713-853-8700. If you receive a call on a landline phone, the caller ID displayed will be *Houston Health 713-853-8700*.
- Automated text messages from Houston Health Department contact tracers will come from 35134, 73940 or 39242.
- Contact tracing automated email assessments from the Houston Health Department will come from [houstonhealthdepartment@qualtrics-survey.com](mailto:houstonhealthdepartment@qualtrics-survey.com).

### **Mental Health:**

- The Houston Health Department offers mental health support through a free helpline staffed by trained mental health professionals.
- People can call the mental health helpline at 713-999-9442 October 1 – December 24, seven days a week from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m.
- The helpline is a great tool for parents dealing with virtual learning stressors, child-care-givers, residents in high positivity zip codes and COH staff on the frontlines of COVID-19. Virtual support groups for parents will soon be available along with tool kits for helping cope with the ongoing pressures of the pandemic.
- Services are also available in Spanish.

### **Post-Testing Support**

- If you or a loved one tests positive and can't work, here's where you can go for help:
  - [Houston Food Bank](#) offers services for families that have been affected by COVID-19, in addition to the numerous locations in the city that distribute food, produce and prepared meals. The Houston Food Bank employs certified navigators who assist with SNAP applications, utility assistance, and rental assistance.
  - [Lone Star Legal Aid](#) can assist with COVID-19-related eviction and foreclosure information, unemployment compensation, public benefits, and domestic violence situations.
  - [211 Texas/United Way HELPLINE](#) is a free helpline operated by United Way of Greater Houston 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in many languages. Trained specialists provide information and referrals from a variety of social service organizations.

## Antibody Testing Survey

- The Houston Health Department and CDC are conducting a **voluntary antibody** testing survey.
- Teams consisting of HHD staff and Houston Fire Department paramedics will visit randomly selected homes in Houston, asking household members to answer survey questions and provide a blood sample.
- The teams will be identifiable by their *Better. Together.* shirts and will never ask for financial or social security information.
- P Phase two starts in the winter of 2021. Phase one was conducted in September.
- Only homes approached by the teams are eligible to participate, and participation is voluntary.
- By choosing to participate, you will provide vital information on who has been exposed to the virus in the past.
- The survey will identify people infected in the past with COVID-19 by the presence of antibodies, proteins the body's immune system makes to fight infections.
- Antibody testing does not replace oral or nasal swab viral testing that looks for current infection, available at free sites across Houston.

## Hispanic Community

- Hispanic Houstonians are experiencing the impact of coronavirus more than any other group based on percentage of cases and deaths.
- No one from the Houston Health Department will ever ask you about your citizenship or immigration status.
- COVID-19 testing does not affect Green Card status or application for a permanent residency card. Undocumented individuals will not be deported if they test positive.
- The Houston Health Department is conducting targeted outreach in the hardest hit zip codes to provide prevention messaging and resources.

## Young People

- Young people can help restore the economy by taking proper precautions to stop the spread.
- Although some of society is open, it is too soon to return to normal life.
- Young people, like everyone else, should minimize contact with others, wear masks and social distance when in public.
- If you are somewhere and you cannot both wear a mask and engage in social distancing, then you need to leave.
- Even young people are getting seriously ill, requiring hospitalization; some are dying.
- Although most healthy young people will recover from the disease, they may unknowingly pass it to people (including family members) who may suffer severe consequences, including death.



## About COVID-19

- Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that primarily spreads through respiratory droplets between people who are in close contact (about six feet) when an infected person coughs, sneezes, speaks, etc.
- There is no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 or specific medication to help people who are sick.
- The main symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Other symptoms include muscle and body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.
- If you have these symptoms, stay at least six feet from others and call your doctor.
- Most healthy people who get COVID-19 will experience mild to severe symptoms and recover.
- People with underlying health conditions like diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and obesity are more likely to suffer severe outcomes, including death.
- We are still learning about COVID-19 and its long-term effects.

## About Better. Together.

WASH HANDS. WEAR A MASK. SOCIAL DISTANCE. GET TESTED.

We are better when we all do our part to stop the spread of COVID-19. Together, we can put Houston on the road to recovery. Thank you for making H-Town BETTER. TOGETHER. [houstonhealth.org](http://houstonhealth.org)

