

WHAT QUESTIONS ARE JOURNALISTS ASKING INFECTIOUS DISEASE EXPERTS?

The [Infectious Diseases Society of America](https://www.idsa-online.org) represents 12,000 physicians, scientists and public health experts who are trained to diagnose and minimize the spread of infectious diseases (ID). They are working in every community and care setting across the nation to control the spread of COVID-19. The battle against this pandemic is unique, and ID experts are working around the clock to protect communities. In addition to their frontline work in health care settings, public health departments and research institutions, IDSA members play a vital role in educating the public.

The following is a list of answers to the most frequent questions that IDSA experts have received during recent interviews.

COMMON COVID-19 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. *What is the difference between coronavirus and COVID-19?*

Coronaviruses are very common and include many ordinary colds. Experts refer to this new disease as the “novel coronavirus,” meaning it’s a new type of coronavirus that was not previously known or understood by health experts. COVID-19 is the illness caused by the novel virus.

People who are at the highest risk for severe complications from COVID-19 are those over 65, people who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility, people with chronic asthma, anyone who may have a compromised immune system, and those with chronic medical conditions like diabetes and lung disease.

2. *What are the symptoms of COVID-19 and how is it spread?*

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, a dry cough, and shortness of breath.

Someone who is positive for COVID-19 can spread the illness to others through coughing or sneezing. The virus can also be transmitted when individuals contact infected surfaces (furniture, door handles, etc.). How long the virus lives on different surfaces is still being determined.

3. *How long does it take for the symptoms of COVID-19 to appear, and what can people do to protect themselves?*

It can take two to 14 days for a person to develop symptoms after initial exposure to the virus. The average is about five days.

For protection, people should wash their hands often for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. If soap is not available, they should use hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol, and avoid touching their face.

In addition, people should stay home when possible—and always if ill. This will help prevent the spread and protect those with compromised immune systems and the elderly who are at higher risk.

Furthermore, people should practice social distancing, staying at least six feet away from others, and stay at home unless it is absolutely necessary to go out.

Lastly, people should always follow local guidance. Community leaders have the most up-to-date guidance on what's happening in a specific area and what to do to stay safe.

4. *What are the benefits of social distancing, and for how long?*

The benefits of social distancing include helping prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protecting those most vulnerable—older adults and people with weakened immune systems. Social distancing also lessens the number of new cases and reduces the care burden on hospitals and health care providers.

How long social distancing will continue is unknown at this time. Infectious disease experts urge the public to follow local guidance. Community leaders have the most up-to-date guidance on what's happening in a specific area and what to do to stay safe.

5. *Are men or women more at risk?*

While too early to definitively answer, a pattern does appear in at least two of the hardest-hit countries: more men are dying than women. This is especially true in Italy. Men there make up nearly 60 percent of people with confirmed cases of the virus and more than 70 percent of those who have died of COVID-19.

6. *What does “flattening the curve” mean?*

In epidemiology—the study of disease—the idea of slowing a virus' spread so that fewer people need to seek treatment at any given time is known as “flattening the curve.” This helps prevent hospital overcrowding and explains why so many countries are implementing social distancing guidelines.

7. *If a person suspects they are sick, how do they get tested?*

If someone has a fever, cough, and shortness of breath, they should call their health care provider. They should not go to the emergency room and potentially expose others in the waiting area. A health care provider can assess symptoms to determine next steps.

Current policies on testing keep changing, so people should check with their local health care provider for the latest guidance.

But always, if feeling sick, stay home.

8. *How do people who are not symptomatic know if they have it?*

Right now, people should treat the situation as if everyone has the virus, to prevent spreading it to other people. That means washing hands frequently, practicing social distancing, and staying home as much as possible, particularly if sick.

Most people with COVID-19 have symptoms—these may be very mild, but people have reported a fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath.

9. *Do people under 30 need to worry?*

Yes, absolutely. The virus can make people sick at any age. Most importantly, though, everyone has an important part to play in preventing the spread of the virus. Younger people may or may not get seriously ill, but they can pass the virus to someone else, including those who are elderly or immunocompromised.

10. *How long is this going to last?*

Experts don't know. What is known is that everyone can play their part to prevent the coronavirus from spreading rapidly. We need to practice social distancing, wash our hands, and follow the guidance of local government and health officials.

11. *What happens if someone in the household gets the virus?*

If a family member doesn't feel well, they should call their health care provider first.

If living with someone confirmed positive for COVID-19, there are steps to take to keep the rest of the household safe while the person who is ill recovers:

- Designate a room so that the person who is sick is separated from the rest of your household.
- Avoid sharing household items such as dishes, utensils, towels, or bedding.
- Clean household surfaces used regularly: light switches, doorknobs, counters, etc.
- And most importantly, everyone in the household should be washing their hands often, for at least 20 seconds.

12. *What household cleaning products will kill the virus?*

Many household cleaners will kill the coronavirus. Look for bleach as an ingredient, or a designation by the manufacturer on the label. In addition, simple soap and water are very effective cleaning tools.

13. *How long does it live on door handles, and in the air?*

There are different research studies looking at this, but experts don't have a definitive answer. What is known is the main way the virus is spread is from person to person. That's why it is so important to wash hands frequently, practice social isolation, and if sick, stay home and away from others.

It may be possible that the virus is spread by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching one's mouth, nose, or possibly eyes. However, this is not the main way the virus is spread.

14. *If a person scheduled a doctor's visit or surgery months ago, should they still go?*

If it's a nonessential visit to a doctor or dentist, reschedule or choose a telehealth visit where appropriate. If it's an elective surgery scheduled, people should work with their health care provider to determine appropriate next steps. No one should go into a hospital right now unless seriously ill.

15. *Is it true that ibuprofen can aggravate the disease?*

That is not true. The evidence is not strong enough to support that claim. If a person has a fever, they should talk to their doctor or health care provider about the best course of treatment.

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