



Returning to work after COVID-19

Months after the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus first entered our global conversations, countries around the world have begun to announce their plans to slowly but surely return to “normal”, lifting shelter-in-place orders.

But COVID-19 isn’t gone forever and getting infected is still possible. So here’s how to protect yourself from getting or spreading the coronavirus at work.

How does the COVID-19 coronavirus spread?

There are three main ways that the COVID-19 coronavirus can spread from person to person. Avoiding exposure to these methods of transmission are your best weapon against the coronavirus.

From close contact

Since the coronavirus is spread through mucous membranes, which are the thin mucus-producing layers that line your airways, it is important to avoid close contact. This is how most infections occur.^{1,2}

What you can do:

- **Keep 6 feet apart from the next person** so that you are out of harm’s way in case they sneeze or cough.
- **Do not share utensils**, cups, dishes, pens, etc.
- **Do not touch people**. This includes handshakes, hugs, and other common sources of physical contact.
- **Keep meetings small** or join with video conferencing.

From contaminated surfaces

Coronavirus RNA (the basic building blocks that make up the virus) can get on almost any surface – plastic, wood, metal, clothes, and so on.³

When an infected person sneezes or coughs, he/she can infect surfaces with their mucous droplets. When you touch a contaminated surface, it gets on your hands (or other body part). And when you touch your face with this hand, you can infect yourself.

What you can do:

- **Do not touch your face.**
- **Wash or sanitize your hands often.** This is because although most people don't intend to touch their face, they inevitably do. By washing and sanitizing your hands often, it reduces the risk of infection in case you do accidentally touch your face.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes** to prevent spreading your own mucous. Wearing a homemade cloth facemask prevents you from spreading your mucous. Do not purchase N95 or KN95 masks, as there is currently limited inventory and these masks are desperately needed by health workers.
- **Change your clothes and shoes when you get home.** After you've finished changing, immediately wash your hands or sanitize them. This gives you a fresh, germ-free start at home.
- **Bathing or showering can be helpful.** Although it's not necessary, taking a hot bath or shower might help you feel better and more refreshed. Using soap or body wash, rinse viral material off your body before you walk around or do any activities in your home.

From contaminated air

When an infected person coughs or sneezes, not all of the mucous membrane that's released lands on surfaces – there is a portion of that mucous that remains airborne.^{4,5}

If the air is left unfiltered after dozens of coughs or sneezes over the course of several hours, the airborne concentration of the virus can become very high. In fact, in hospital settings or in the homes of people who are infected, the airborne concentration can be so high that simply breathing in this environment can cause infection.

This is why health workers, medical professionals and first responders need special safety equipment, such as N95 or KN95 masks.

It's important to note that without the presence of infected persons constantly coughing or sneezing, airborne coronavirus transmission is highly unlikely.

What you can do:

- **Keep 6 feet apart from the next person** so that you are out of harm's way in case they sneeze or cough.
- **Do not purchase N95 or KN95 masks** during times like these when inventory is low. When you refrain from purchasing such items, it helps enable medical workers, professionals, and first responders to have the necessary equipment they need to be safe.
- **Consider using a [personal air purifier](#) at your desk.** Delivering purified air directly to your breathing zone can help prevent any airborne contaminants from getting into your airways.

The takeaway

There's growing evidence that the number of new COVID-19 cases may be starting to drop as strict stay-at-home and shelter-in-place orders have effectively "flattened the curve" of infection.

But even as governments and businesses lift restrictions, the danger of the coronavirus is still real. Make sure you and those around you are consistently taking the proper measures to protect yourselves.