

What Public Health Inspectors Need to Know about COVID-19

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Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness (see list of [symptoms](#)). It is caused by a virus (SARS-COV-2).

COVID-19 can sometimes cause serious complications. [People at increased risk for severe illness](#) include:

- Older adults
- People of any age who have underlying medical conditions

How COVID-19 spreads

COVID-19 is a new disease and we are still learning about it. Here's what we currently know:

- It mainly [spreads](#) from person-to-person.
 - Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
 - Through respiratory droplets produced when a person who has COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or talks.
- You can get the virus from people who don't seem sick or have symptoms.
- You might be able to get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your face, mouth, nose, or eyes.

As a public health inspector, you might come into contact with the virus at your job by

- Being in [close contact](#) with other people, including coworkers, the employees of the inspection facility, the public, at the office, during travel, or during inspections.
- Touching or handling frequently touched surfaces and equipment, and then touching your face, mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Investigating facilities where COVID-19 transmission is occurring or has occurred, including healthcare facilities.

How you can protect yourself and others

Stay home if you are having [symptoms](#) of COVID-19.

- Follow [CDC recommended steps](#) if you are sick.
- Notify your employer if you test positive for COVID-19.
- Do not return to work until the criteria to [discontinue home isolation](#) are met.
 - Talk with your healthcare provider about when it's safe for you to return to work.
- Follow [CDC recommended precautions](#) and tell your supervisor if you are well but someone you live with or have had

recent [close contact](#) with has COVID-19.

Stay at least 6 feet away from workers, customers and coworkers, when possible.

- Consider options to virtually conduct inspections or parts of inspections (such as interviews and opening/closing meetings).
- Schedule inspections when there are fewer workers or other people at the facility, if possible.
- Identify the point of contact for the COVID-19 precautions at the facility to be inspected, to ensure you have the proper training and equipment to safely conduct the assessment.
- [Follow CDC recommendations for travel](#) if you must travel to conduct the inspections.

[Wear a cloth face covering](#) in public and at work or the facility being inspected when other [social distancing](#) measures are difficult to maintain. Face coverings may prevent people who don't know they have the virus from spreading it to others.

- Be careful when putting on and taking off cloth face coverings.
 - Don't touch the face covering while wearing it.
 - Don't touch your face, mouth, nose, or eyes while taking off the covering.
 - Wash your hands before putting on and after taking off the covering.
 - [Wash the covering](#) after each use.
- Cloth face coverings should not be worn if their use creates other risk (for example, interferes with driving or vision, or contributions to heat-related illness) that exceeds their COVID-19 related benefits of slowing the spread of the virus. Cloth face coverings should also not be worn by anyone who has trouble breathing or is unable to remove the covering without assistance. CDC provides information on [adaptations and alternatives](#) that should be considered when cloth faces coverings may not be feasible.
- Cloth face coverings are not considered personal protective equipment (PPE) because they are designed to protect others, not the wearer. PPE may be required for inspections where there are known or suspected COVID-19 patients (such as a healthcare facility). See [Infection Control Guidance for Healthcare Professionals about Coronavirus](#) for more information.

Be aware of contact with frequently touched surfaces.

- Avoid touching your mouth, nose, or eyes when handling frequently touched items.
- Only bring necessary equipment to an inspection to minimize the number of items that need to be cleaned and disinfected afterwards.
- Use folders or envelopes to segregate paper records from other materials.

[Wash your hands](#) regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. You don't need to wear gloves if you wash your hands regularly (unless they are already required for your job).

- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol, if soap and water aren't available.
- Wash your hands at these key times:
 - Before, during, and after preparing food.
 - Before eating food.
 - After using the toilet.
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - After putting on, touching, or removing cloth face coverings.
 - Before and after work and work breaks.
 - After touching surfaces such as desks, door handles, clipboards, pens, cameras, cell phones, laptops, keyboards, or electronic tablets.

Do not touch your face, mouth, nose, or eyes.

[Cover your coughs and sneezes.](#)

- Use tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Throw used tissues in the trash.

How to cope with stress

Mental health is an important part of worker safety and health. The COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges in the ways many people work and connect with others, which may raise feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Information and resources about mental health, knowing signs of stress, taking steps to manage stress, and knowing where to go if you need help are available [here](#).

How your employer can protect you

Your employer should develop a COVID-19 response plan and share it with you. We created [a fact sheet to help your employer](#).

How to get more Information

Talk to your employer or supervisor, or whoever is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Use these sources for more information on reducing the risk of worker exposures to COVID-19:

- [CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to COVID-19](#)
- [CDC Information for Healthcare Professionals about Coronavirus](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)
- [CDC Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes](#)
- [NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topic: COVID-19](#)
- [CDC COVID-19](#)
- [OSHA COVID-19](#) 
- [OSHA Guidelines on Preparing Workplaces for COVID](#)  
- CDCINFO: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348 | website: [cdc.gov/info](https://www.cdc.gov/info)