

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS

I am not sure if it is safe for me to return to work. Where or who should I talk to about my concerns?

LDH recommends that any concerns you have about your health, testing practices or your organization's return to work policies should be discussed with your healthcare provider and your employer.

Where I work, an employee's spouse tested positive for COVID-19. Is there a quarantine period for that employee before they can return to work?

The Department of Health advises people who have been a close contact (within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes) of a known case, to self-quarantine at home for 14 days and monitor for symptoms.

I am an office worker but my company is near the top of a high-rise building. What about the risk of riding in elevators, or simply pushing the buttons?

It's difficult to maintain a distance of 6 feet in an elevator with others. Limiting capacity is one possibility for employers and building managers, even if it means creating a queue of people waiting (6 feet apart) in the lobby. Elevator buttons, like doors, doorknobs, faucets, and water fountains, must be cleaned frequently.

When can someone who had COVID-19 symptoms return to work?

This person can return to work when at least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery meaning:

- fever free without the use of fever-reducing medications and
- improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) and
- at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

When can a person with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 who had been caring for themselves at home return?

This person can return to work under the following conditions:

- fever free without the use of fever-reducing medications and
- improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) and
- negative COVID test results from at least two consecutive nose swab specimens collected ≥ 24 hours apart (total of two negative specimens).

When can a person who had laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 but did not have any symptoms return to work?

This person can return to work when at least 10 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test and have had no subsequent illness. Anyone suspected of having COVID-19 who have been tested and the test comes back negative may return to work provided they feel well.

Should the general public wear a protective mask?

New studies of the spread of the novel coronavirus show that a significant number of people with coronavirus lack symptoms but can spread the virus to others. In light of this new evidence, CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures - remaining at least six feet apart - are difficult to maintain - such as grocery stores and pharmacies - especially in areas where is significant community transmission.

How should I clean and store my face mask?

Cloth face masks should be washed regularly, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It is best to clean your mask in a washing machine or with soap and hot water. The mask should be dried completely. Dry it in a hot dryer, if possible.

When checking someone for a fever, what is the normal temperature for a child or adolescent?

Anything above 100.4 should be considered a "fever." However, we recommend a second temperature check for that person if they have been exerting themselves (running), or in the sun for a period of time and their temperature is more than 100.4. It can be rechecked after a few minutes of calm or shade.

How long can the virus stay on hard surfaces, cardboard and fabrics?

Studies suggest that coronavirus can survive on metal for up to five days, on glass for four to five days, and plastic for up to nine days, according to a recent study by the Journal of Hospital Infection. The same studies show coronavirus can survive up to 24 hours on cardboard.

It is not clear yet, but the virus may have a shorter lifespan on fabrics than on hard surfaces.

For all surfaces, the best bet is to clean visibly dirty areas, then use enough disinfectant for the surface you're cleaning to remain wet for several minutes.

Do I need to wear a mask for work?

All employees of a business who have contact with the public must wear a mask.

Do I need to wear a mask when I leave the house?

The CDC and the Louisiana Department of Health strongly urge everyone to wear masks when in public.

Can masks be reused?

Throw out disposable facemasks and gloves after using them. Do not reuse.

Place all used disposable gloves, facemasks, and other contaminated items in a lined container before disposing of them with other household waste. Clean your hands immediately after handling these items.

What are the best items to use to clean surfaces and protect from COVID-19?

COVID-19 does not require any unique cleaning chemicals to disinfect surfaces. Soap and water works, and you can use an alcohol-based wipe. Baby wipes may not be effective.

How does COVID-19 spread?

Health experts are still learning the details about how this new coronavirus spreads.

Other coronaviruses spread from an infected person to others through:

- Respiratory droplets produced when coughing and sneezing
- Close personal contact
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes

CONTACT TRACING

What is contact tracing. Is this being done in Louisiana?

Contact tracing is a type of disease investigation. Trained interviewers talk to people who have been diagnosed with the virus and ask questions to determine who else they may have recently been in contact with. Then, they find those people who may have been exposed, and encourage them to quarantine themselves to prevent spreading the disease any further.

For more information, go to: <http://ldh.la.gov/ContactTracing>.

How do employers know the validity of letters/emails sent by a contact tracer to a person who has been told to quarantine because of exposure to COVID-19?

When a contact tracer notifies a person they have been exposed, they can request to receive an email from the contact tracer with a letter the person can provide to their employer. The letter will be on official State of Louisiana letterhead.

Will a contact tracer initiate contact with an individual by email or mail?

No, all contacts by contact tracers are initiated by phone using the number 1-877-766-2130.

However, after this phone contact has been made, the person who has been exposed may require proof of the exposure for their employer. The contact can request a letter that they can give to their employer verifying they have been told to self-quarantine.

I received an email or mailed letter regarding contact tracing but no one has called me. Why did this happen?

An individual should not get a letter or an email before having spoken with a contact tracer. If this occurred, the individual should call the contact tracing team at 1-877-766-2130. There should not be an instance where mail or email is received without having spoken with a contact tracer.

How does one apply for a contact tracing job?

Contact tracers must have graduated high school, feel comfortable having a telephone conversation with someone and also comfortable entering data. They must be compassionate, able to protect and honor patient privacy, and complete a very detailed training session. To apply, email ContactTracing@La.gov.

How does contact tracing work?

A contact tracer is a public health worker who attempts to identify all people who were exposed to someone with COVID-19. This is how it works:

- People who test positive will be called by a contact tracer.
- The contact tracer will ask questions about the person's health status, where they have traveled, who else they have been in contact with during the time the person was contagious.
- The contact tracer then notifies any close contacts that they have been exposed to the virus.
- Contact tracers will advise the close contacts to stay home, monitor their symptoms, and may advise them to get tested.
- To protect privacy, those who are called by a contact tracer are only informed that they may have been exposed to the virus on a certain date; they are not told the identity of the person who may have exposed them.

- Contact tracers will also try to link people who tested positive and their close contacts to important health and social services that might be needed while they are required to stay at home.

Who is considered to be a close contact?

A close contact is a person who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes starting from 48 hours before illness onset until the time the infected patient is isolated.

I received a call or message from a contact tracer. Why do they want to talk to me?

The Louisiana Department of Health has a team of contract tracers who call anyone who tested positive for COVID-19 and anyone who might have been in close contact with someone known to have tested positive. If someone you know or have been in close contact with has tested positive, the contact tracing team will call you to see how you are feeling, if you are having any symptoms, offer support for getting tested, and provide information on how to self-quarantine.

What's the difference between isolation and quarantine?

Isolation separates sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick to prevent transmission to others. Quarantine separates and limits the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick, and prevent transmission to others.

How do I know if the contact tracer is from the Louisiana Department of Health and not a fraud or scammer trying to ask me personal questions?

The official Louisiana contact tracers will identify themselves as being from the Louisiana Department of Health. The caller ID on the phone should show "LA Health Dept." They will never ask you about your finances or other personal information. They will never ask you to buy any gift cards, or ask your banking information or social security number. If someone asks you any of these questions, hang up right away and do not give this information.

My doctor has not contacted me about my test results but I got a call from someone wanting to know about my whereabouts. Do I have to talk to them before I receive my results? Do I have to talk to them at all?

Sometimes the health department will get positive test results from a lab and call that person before their doctor gets a chance to call them with the results. The health department tries to call people as soon as possible in order to share information about how to keep the illness from spreading to others. You can always ask the contact tracer to call you back after you've had a chance to call your doctor. You will not be required to speak to the health department about your results. However, we strongly encourage you to speak with the Louisiana Department of Health, because this is an important way to help keep yourself and others safe and to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Will the information I share with the contact tracer be kept confidential?

Yes. The health department contacts people who test positive and their close contacts. The health department will not tell the contacts who tested positive or where they may have been when exposed, they will only share the date they were exposed. All information is kept private.

If I don't get contacted by a contact tracer, is that a sign that I have NOT come in contact with anyone who tested positive for Covid-19?

Unfortunately, no. You may have come in contact with someone who has tested positive, but they did not realize they were in close contact with you or they forgot to tell the contact tracing team. You may also have come in contact with someone who had a COVID-19 infection, but did not get tested. If you

believe you may have been exposed in some way, take reasonable precautions to self-quarantine and call your primary care provider.

SUMMERTIME ACTIVITIES

Is it safe to go swimming?

Experts don't believe the virus can spread very easily through the water, whether it is salt water or chlorinated, swimming pool water. The virus isn't going to move across the water from one person to another. The risk, however, is getting too close to others while in the pool. That's the same risk as if you are not in a pool.

What about going to summer camps or large get-togethers like family barbecues?

Camping, fishing and barbecuing are all low risk activities. Families should get outside. To be safe, identify who is in your close group – know who they are because that contributes to your exposure risk. Know if there are members of your close group who are at a higher risk ... such as over 65 or who have underlying health conditions.

What is riskier, are the things you have to do to get to the campsite or the fishing site. This includes stopping at a gas station or going shopping for supplies. This is where you really need to take the precautions; wear masks, use hand sanitizer and keep your distance from others.

Are there any summertime activities that people should avoid altogether?

You should avoid anything that involves a crowd. When you are real close to others, your or someone else's respiratory droplets can spread the virus. The same distance requirements apply whether indoors or outside.

What about going out to eat?

You should always try to decrease your risks. If the restaurant offers outdoor seating, use that option because eating outside is safer. You should also judge the establishment to get a sense as to how seriously they take these precautions. If you see a whole bunch of people crowding around one another, that's not a place you want to go to. It's not worth the risk.

What about hotels and vacation homes ... what precautions should we take when renting a room or another place to stay?

Make sure that wherever you stay, that the business – Airbnb, hotel and condo operator – should thoroughly clean and wipe down between guests. This includes cleaning hard surfaces, door handles, bathrooms.

You should also wipe things down yourself with a clean, sanitized cloth rag. The biggest risk is when you are in the lobby when you are checking in or leaving. Be sure to keep distance between yourself and others. You want to make sure you are wearing your mask and that other people are wearing their masks. That will increase your safety.

Is it safe to travel this summer?

When traveling by plane, use your mask on the flight and while in the airport. This will go a long way to prevent the spread of the virus. People should be aware of all of hard surfaces they touch. Limit the amount that you touch countertops, door handles, handrails, escalator rails. Use hand sanitizer after touching these surfaces.

Also, do what you can to avoid lines. If you see a line forming, just hang back and wait until that line gets shorter. Be cognizant of the people around you. And, if possible, avoid situations where you would be within six feet of others.

Is it possible to have a safe, summer vacation?

Yes, it is possible to be safe on a summer vacation. But, families may want to reevaluate where they want to go. Today, driving a few hours is a more appealing option than getting on a plane because it's a lot simpler.

You should watch the news to see what's going on in the locations that you are considering as a destination. If I was planning a trip to a place where they are experiencing a growing outbreak, I would reconsider and go someplace else. Families should take this all into consideration.

Anytime you travel there are risks. There are things families can do to mitigate their risks because you can't eliminate all risks. You have to look at your family situation, take into account who is in your family; do you have older family members or do some members have underlying conditions, take those into account and make a responsible decision.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

What is social distancing?

Social distancing is a public health practice that aims to prevent sick people from coming into close contact with healthy people in order to reduce opportunities for disease transmission.

Social distancing slows the outbreak to reduce the chance of infection among high-risk populations and to reduce the burden on our health care system and worker.

If we do this right, we can reduce the number of people with disease and reduce the number of people needing hospitalization and ventilators at any one time.

What is social distancing (or the safe zone)?

Social distancing, also called "physical distancing," means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. To practice social or physical distancing:

- Stay at least 6 feet (2 meters) from other people
- Do not gather in groups
- Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings