

Talking points about COVID and treatments for health care providers



COVID basics

COVID can cause many different symptoms. Common symptoms include:

- Sore throat
- Cough
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Congestion or runny nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Fever or chills
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Loss of taste or smell
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

These aren't all the possible symptoms of COVID.

Although COVID primarily affects the lungs, it can also affect other parts of the body, including the blood, brain, heart, kidneys, liver, and skin.

Most people with COVID have mild symptoms and get better within a week or so. But some people get so sick that they need hospital care. They can even die.

Risk for severe COVID

There's no way to know for sure how COVID will affect you. But there are certain factors that make some people more likely than others to get very sick:

- **Older age**—risk for severe illness from COVID increases with age, especially for people 50 and older.
- **Compromised or weakened immune system**—either due to a medical condition or medication that weakens the immune system, such as chemotherapy or corticosteroids.
- **Certain health issues**—having one or more particular health issues increases your risk more than others. And the more you have, the higher your risk. Common health issues that increase your risk include:
 - Heart or lung disease
 - Diabetes
 - Asthma
 - Overweight and obesity
 - Cancer
 - Conditions of the kidneys or liver
 - Some disabilities
 - HIV infection
 - Mental health conditions
 - Physical inactivity
 - Smoking, current or former
 - Substance use disorders

How to prevent getting COVID

You can reduce your chances of getting COVID in the first place by:

- Getting vaccinated and staying up to date with your COVID vaccine.
- Wearing a well-fitting mask (preferably an N95 or KN95 respirator) around others.
- Keeping your distance from people who don't live with you.
- Avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces.
- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if you don't have soap and water.

How to prevent severe COVID

Get vaccinated

Everyone 6 months and older should get vaccinated against COVID.

The COVID vaccines available in the United States are safe and effective.

Staying up to date with your COVID vaccine is the best way to protect yourself from getting very sick from COVID.

Get tested and treated right away

If you're more likely than others to get very sick from COVID, you need to start medical treatment for COVID within days after symptoms first appear.

FDA has authorized or approved prescription antiviral medicines that can help protect you from getting very sick from COVID.

Antivirals work to stop the COVID virus from multiplying and spreading in your body.

An antiviral medication can be pills for you to swallow. It can also be an IV infusion, or drip, in which the medicine is delivered slowly into a vein with a needle.

Don't wait. It's important to get tested quickly if you have symptoms of COVID. For these treatments to work, they need to be started within days of when your symptoms start.

Even if your symptoms are mild, treating your COVID early with medicine prescribed by a doctor can make your infection less severe and help keep you out of the hospital. It could save your life.

I can help you decide which treatment, if any, is right for you based on your medical history. I also need to know what medicines, if any, you're taking, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Certain medicines can affect how these treatments work or can be dangerous if taken at the same time.

When to get emergency medical care

Get emergency medical care (call 911) if you or someone you know has any of the following or has other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent chest pain or pressure
- New confusion
- Trouble waking up or staying awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone

How to manage mild COVID symptoms

- Stay home and rest for at least 5 days and until your symptoms improve and you are fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medicine).
- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of nonalcoholic fluids.
- To help relieve fever and aches, you can take over-the-counter medicines, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- To soothe a sore throat, you can gargle with warm salt water. You can also use throat lozenges, ice chips, or sore throat spray.
- To help ease congestion or a cough, you can use a humidifier or vaporizer to increase air moisture in your home. You can also use saline nasal drops or sprays.
- Don't smoke or vape.

How to prevent spreading COVID to others

- Wear a well-fitting mask (preferably an N95 or KN95 respirator) when around other people.
- Stay home for at least 5 days from when your symptoms start, except to get medical care.
- If you must leave your home, don't take public transportation, taxis, or rideshares like Uber or Lyft.
- As much as possible, stay in a specific room in your home, away from other people and pets. Use a separate bathroom if you can.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if you don't have soap and water.