King County

COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations – Frequently Asked Questions

Safe Start

Working together, our community has slowed the spread of COVID-19. Now, King County is working to reopen the local economy gradually and carefully.

The governor's "Safe Start" plan for reopening has four phases. The plan allows for more activities in each phase depending on the amount of COVID-19 disease and whether the spread of COVID-19 can be contained.

To help stop the spread of COVID-19, Governor Inslee has asked Washington residents to stay home as much as possible and do their part to keep everyone healthy. This is especially important as the state begins to gradually reopen and we work together to prevent outbreaks.

- King County is currently in Phase 2 of the Safe Start plan.

- Learn more about the order and Safe Start: www.coronavirus.wa.gov.

Testing for COVID-19

Who should get tested for COVID-19?

Anyone who is experiencing even mild COVID-like symptoms should isolate themselves away from others and call their healthcare provider. Getting tested as soon as possible is important to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Anyone with these symptoms should call their provider to be evaluated for a test:

- Cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever or chills, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea.

It is important to isolate yourself as soon as you develop symptoms, even before you are tested, because if you have COVID-19, you are already contagious.

If you have been in close contact for more than 15 minutes with someone who has COVID-19, it's important to get tested right away, even if you don't have symptoms. Take action quickly and follow the instructions on this "What to do" factsheet.

How do I get a test for COVID-19?

Most testing is completed through healthcare providers. You should call your healthcare provider if you feel sick, live in the same household as someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, or have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19. Each healthcare system has its own testing processes. Many providers require appointments to prevent overcrowding and to be sure that they have supplies.

If you need to be tested and don't have a provider who can do the test, check out the list of [FREE testing locations in King County](#) or call the King County COVID-19 call center from 8 AM – 7 PM at 206-477-3977.

Where can I get tested?

If you have a doctor or healthcare provider, call them to be evaluated for a test.

If you don't have a healthcare provider, [free or low-cost testing is available at several King County locations](#), regardless of immigration status. Multiple languages are spoken and phone interpretation is available at each site. You can also call the King County COVID-19 Call Center at 206-477-3977 from 8 AM – 7 PM for assistance. If you need an interpreter, say the name of your language.

General Information

What is COVID-19?

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new virus strain spreading from person-to-person. It is currently in the United States and many other countries, after originating in China. Health experts are concerned because this new virus has the potential to cause severe illness and pneumonia in some people — especially people over age 60 or who have weakened immune systems.

How does COVID-19 spread?

Health experts are still learning more about the spread. Currently it is thought to spread:

- through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes

- between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet)

- by touching a surface or object with the virus and then touching the mouth, nose, or eyes

How severe is COVID-19?

Most coronavirus illnesses are mild with fever and cough. The vast majority of people with novel coronavirus infection do not require hospital care. A much smaller percentage of people get severely ill with lung and breathing problems like pneumonia. Elderly people and people with underlying medical conditions are at highest risk for severe disease.

What are the symptoms?

People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19: fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea. This list is not all possible symptoms. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you.

When do I seek medical evaluation and advice?

If you have COVID-19-like symptoms, contact your regular doctor first. Do not go to the emergency room. Emergency rooms need to be able to serve those with the most critical needs. If you have difficulty breathing, it doesn't mean you have novel coronavirus, but you should call 911.

If you're over 60 and you have underlying conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and lung disease, come up with a plan with your doctor to identify your health risks for coronavirus and how to manage symptoms. Contact your doctor right away if you do have symptoms.

If you have symptoms and you were exposed to someone confirmed to have the virus, call your health care provider. If you do not have a healthcare provider, call the King County COVID-19 call center between 8 AM – 7 PM at 206-477-3977.

Need help finding a doctor or getting health insurance? Call the [Community Health Access Program](#) (CHAP): 1 (800) 756-5437 or the Help Me Grow Washington Hotline: 1 (800) 322-2588.

How can I protect myself from COVID-19?

It's important that everyone take steps to reduce the spread of novel coronavirus, especially to protect those who are more vulnerable. Steps you can take to prevent spread of flu and the common cold will also help prevent coronavirus:

- wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If not available, use hand sanitizer.

- avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands

- avoid contact with people who are sick especially if you are 60 or over or have an underlying health condition, like heart disease, diabetes, lung disease or a weakened immune system.

- stay home while you are sick and stay at least 6 feet away from others.

- cover your mouth/nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing

- wear a cloth mask which covers your mouth and nose, when outside your home.

If you are traveling overseas, check for the latest COVID-19 Travel Alerts and follow the CDC's Travelers' Health guidance.

Currently, there are no vaccines available to prevent COVID-19 infections.

How is COVID-19 treated?

There are no medications specifically approved for COVID-19. Most people with mild COVID-19 illness will recover on their own by drinking plenty of fluids, resting, and taking pain and fever medications. However, some cases develop pneumonia and require medical care or hospitalization.

Am I required to wear a face covering?

The Washington Department of Health [requires anyone in Washington State to wear a cloth face covering in public](#) when unable to stay 6 feet away from others.

You are directed to wear face coverings over your nose and mouth while in an indoor public setting where you may be within 6 feet of someone who does not live with you. You are also directed to wear a cloth face covering in an outdoor public setting – like a farmer's market or a crowded park – where it is difficult to maintain six feet of physical distance at all times.

A face covering is not needed when you are outside walking, exercising, or otherwise outdoors if you are able to regularly stay 6 feet away from other people who do not live with you.

To protect yourself, wear face coverings properly. Your mask should cover your nose and mouth at all times. Always wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer before you put on a face covering and after removing it. Change your face covering when it gets moist. Wash your face covering after each use.

For more information, including DIY face covering instructions and business signage resources, visit [kingcounty.gov/masks](#).

Why is the face covering requirement in place?

The [CDC recommends](#) that in communities like King County and Washington State, where there is significant community-based transmission, all individuals cover their noses and mouths with a cloth face covering to prevent spreading COVID-19.

We know people with COVID-19 may not show symptoms and can still spread the virus to others. Recent research indicates wearing a face covering can significantly reduce the spread and incidence of COVID-19.

We have made progress slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our communities, but most people do not have immunity to the disease and remain susceptible. As a community, a surge of new cases could make many more people ill and overwhelm our health care system's ability to treat those with serious complications of the disease and non-COVID related emergencies.

Can you get re-infected with COVID-19?

It is currently unknown how long COVID-19 immunity lasts after the initial infection with disease. It may be possible to become infected with COVID-19 twice.

The Washington State Dept. of Health has established a call center to address questions from the public.

If you have questions about what is happening in Washington state, how the virus is spread, and what to do if you have symptoms, please call 1-800-525-0127 and press #.