

Updated: Friday, March 6, 2020

You are receiving these instructions because you were evaluated by a physician for potential coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) but did not meet the criteria for testing. In this letter, we want to answer some frequently asked questions and, if possible, alleviate your concerns. If you have more questions, please contact your health care provider.

COVID-19 was first detected in Wuhan, China, in late 2019 but has now spread around the globe. Most people who are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 were exposed to it by traveling to an affected area or by close contact with someone known to have COVID-19. It is possible to catch COVID-19 without these types of exposures but the risk is much lower. For that reason, testing is generally approved by the New York State Department of Health and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene mainly for patients with these types of exposures, or patients who are seriously ill and who have tested negative for other types of respiratory illnesses.

The testing criteria were set up to focus our resources on the most urgent cases. While they may change in the future, for now, **you do not meet the criteria for testing. However, you may have COVID-19 or another respiratory infection like the flu. In these circumstances, we recommend self-isolation.**

Self-isolation means the following:

Stay home

As long as you are having symptoms, you should restrict activities outside your home, except for getting medical care (see below). **Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.** Prohibit visitors who do not have an essential need to be in your home.

Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home

You should stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home as much as possible. If available, use a separate bathroom. Household members should care for any pets in the home. Do not handle pets or other animals while sick. For more information, see [2019-nCoV and Animals](#).

Call ahead before visiting your doctor

If you have a medical appointment, call your health care provider and tell them that you may have COVID-19 or another respiratory illness. This will help the provider take steps to keep other people, including health care workers, from getting exposed or infected.

Wear a face mask

You should wear a face mask when you are around other people (e.g., when you share a room or vehicle) and before you enter a health care provider's office. If you are not able to wear a face mask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing) or you can't obtain one, then people who live with you should avoid being in the same room with you unless absolutely necessary.

Cover your cough and sneeze

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in a lined trash can and immediately clean your hands as instructed below.

Clean your hands often

Wash your hands often with soap and water for **at least 20 seconds** or clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Rub sanitizer over all surfaces of hands and fingers until hands are dry. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Avoid sharing personal household items

You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people or pets in your home. After using these items, they should be washed thoroughly with soap and water.

Clean all "high-touch" surfaces every day

High-touch surfaces include counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables. Clean these surfaces every day. Use a household cleaning spray or wipe according to the label instructions.

Monitor your symptoms

Seek prompt medical attention if your illness is getting worse (e.g., difficulty breathing). **Before** seeking care, call your health care provider and tell them that you have been advised that you may have COVID-19 or other respiratory illness. Put on a face mask before you enter the facility. These steps will help the health care provider's office to keep other people from being exposed.

If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, let them know you may have COVID-19. If possible, put on a face mask before emergency medical services arrive.

Discontinuing Self-isolation

Although there are no official recommendations it may be prudent to self-isolate for **at least 3-5 days after your fever and/or respiratory symptoms have gone away**. This advice is also given for other respiratory infections, like the flu.

What should I advise my close contacts?

Household members, intimate partners, caregivers, and any person who has had close contact with you should monitor their health for symptoms of respiratory illness. They should call their health care provider right away if they develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 including fever, cough, or shortness of breath.

For more information

This guide is adapted from [information made available](#) through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as of March 5, 2020. New information may become available as the outbreak continues to evolve. For the most updated information on COVID-19, please visit the CDC website at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). You can also discuss any additional questions with your state or local health department or health care provider.