COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions

Last Updated: March 24, 2020

Questions marked with an asterisk are the most recent information as of the last update to these questions. The best resource for the most updated information is the County's website, the State Health Department Website and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website.

COVID-19 Background and Basic Information

What is novel coronavirus?

The novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a new type of coronavirus that has been identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness. The outbreak originated in China and has now spread to other countries, including the US.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not previously been identified. The virus causing COVID-19 is not the same as the strains of coronaviruses that commonly occur among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

The best place to find the most updated information for Mecklenburg County is by visiting our website, MeckNC.gov and following us on social media. If you do not find the information you are looking for on our website, please call 980-314-9400 with questions.

Where did COVID-19 come from? What is the source?

Although this is NOT common, experts believe that COVID-19 started as an animal coronavirus that changed and can now infect people.

The first cases of COVID-19 were linked to a live animal market in China, although this has NOT been confirmed as the source. The virus has now spread to other countries, including the US.

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID- 19 is spread -

- o Mainly person-to-person. Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- o Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

- o It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

It's important to remember that disease, including COVID-19 can make anyone sick regardless of their race or nationality.

Can someone who has had COVID-19 spread the illness to others?

Yes, the virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person. Someone who is currently sick with COVID-19 can spread the illness to others.

*Can COVID-19 be spread through food?

Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food. Before preparing or eating food it is important to always wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds for general food safety. Throughout the day wash your hands after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing, or going to the bathroom.

*Can COVID-19 be spread through package or products shipped from another country?

Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with imported goods and there have not been any cases of COVID-19 in the United States associated with imported goods. Information will be provided on the [Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) website](#) as it becomes available.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

COIVD-19 causes a respiratory illness that ranges from mild to severe. The most common symptoms are fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

*Who is currently at increased risk of COVID-19?

The risk of infection depends on exposure. When there were few cases of COVID-19 in the United States, the risk was higher for individuals who traveled to areas where COVID-19 was known to be spreading in the community or who had contact with an individual infected with COVID-19. Currently with COVID-19 cases being reported from all 50 states, North Carolina and Mecklenburg County are seeing community transmission which means everyone is at risk for contacting COVID-19 and should take appropriate precautions.

It is important to remember that people – including those of Asian descent – who do not live in or have not recently been in an area of ongoing spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, or have not been in contact with a person who is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 are not at greater risk of spreading COVID-19 than other Americans

*Who is at higher risk for complications from COVID-19?

Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. (A more detailed explanation is available [here on the CDC page](#).) If you are at increased risk for COVID-19 complications due to age or because you have a severe underlying medical condition, it is especially important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of exposure. These include:

- Avoid non-essential travel

- Practice Social Distancing:
    - Stay at home unless you must report to work
    - Avoid crowds
    - In public stay at least six feet away from other people
- Stay home when you are sick
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning product.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol.

How is COVID-19 diagnosed?

There is a specific laboratory test for COVID-19. Call your healthcare professional or the Public Health Department at 980-314-9400 if you feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing.

Is there a treatment for COVID-19?

Currently, there is no approved treatment for COVID-19. Medical management involves addressing the underlying symptoms and is determined on a case-by-case basis in coordination with an individual's healthcare professional. Not all individuals with COVID-19 will require hospitalization .

There are currently clinical trials in progress to determine if existing medications work for COVID-19.

*Is there a vaccine against COVID-19?

Currently, these is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. Public health professionals and scientists are working on developing a vaccine but that will take time before it is available to the public.

General Risk Questions

Am I at risk for COVID-19 in North Carolina?

You can find the most updated information regarding the number of cases, the risk to the public, and ways to protect yourself and the community from COVID-19 on the County's website, MeckNC.gov

North Carolina and Mecklenburg County are currently experiencing community transmission of COVID-19

Where have cases of COVID-19 been identified?

Cases of COVID-19 have been reported from almost every country in the world as well as all fifty states in the U.S. The most updated information is available on the County's website, MeckNC.gov or on the CDC's website here.

How can I protect myself from getting COVID-19?

To protect yourself from illness,

- Avoid non-essential travel
- Practice Social Distancing:
  - Stay at home unless you must report to work
  - Avoid crowds
  - In public stay at least six feet away from other people
- Stay home when you are sick
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning product.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol.

Should I buy a facemask?

The CDC does NOT recommend the use of face masks by people who are NOT sick as a way to protect yourself from respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. You should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it. A facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms. This is to protect others from the risk of getting ill.

What should I do if I believe I may have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19?

If you believe you have had close contact with someone who has COVID-19, please contact the health department at 980-314-9400. If you are experiencing symptoms and need to seek medical attention, please call ahead to a healthcare professional and tell them about your symptoms, potential exposures, and any recent travel before going.

*Are there special cleaning supplies that should be used for COVID-19?

The CDC currently recommends using products that have been registered with the EPA with novel virus claims. These products must be used according to manufacturer's instructions. The full list of products can [be found here](#).

Preventing COVID-19 Spread

*What should schools, universities, businesses, and community and faith-based organizations be doing to prepare for and help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our communities?

The most current guidance can be found on the [CDC's Preventing COVID-19 Spread in the Communities webpage here.](#)

As of March 14, 2020, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper issues executive order that bans mass gatherings of more than 100 people and closes K-12 public schools across the state for two weeks beginning March 16. The most current guidance can be found on [North Carolina's Department of Health and Human Services COVID-19](#) webpage.

*What are the current recommendations regarding large community events and mass gatherings?

Mecklenburg County has prohibited gatherings of 50 people or more until April 12. The County has also closed all gyms, health clubs, fitness centers, and theaters. North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper has also issued executive orders closing all restaurans and bars for dine-in service.
The most current guidance can be found on [North Carolina's Department of Health and Human Services COVID-19](#) webpage.

Additional guidance can be found on the [CDC's Preventing COVID-19 Spread in the Communities webpage here.](#)

Should businesses recommend facemasks or other protective equipment during travel?

CDC does not recommend travelers wear facemasks to protect themselves from COVID-19. It is more important that you follow the everyday prevention practices.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

- Stay home when you are sick.

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning product.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol.

Should I stay home from work or keep my child home from schoo/daycarel?

As always, anyone who is unwell should not be at school or at work.

If you returned from a CDC designated Warning – Level 3 country in the past 14 days, then you should self-quarantine for 14 days.

Close contacts with a confirmed COVID-19 case will need to self-quarantine for 14 days from the date of close contact.

If you develop symptoms including fever, coughing and difficulty breathing you should contact your healthcare provider or the Health Department.

As of March 23, 2020, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper issues executive order that bans mass gatherings of more than 50 people and closes K-12 public schools across the state until May 15, 2020. The most current guidance can be found on North Carolina's Department of Health and Human Services COVID-19 webpage.

Travel

*Where can I find the most current travel recommendations?

The most current travel recommendations can be found on the [CDC's Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information Travel website here](#).

Please note that these recommendations may change as the situation evolves. Therefore, please continue to check back frequently if you have recent or upcoming travel.

International Travel
The State Department has issued a Global Level 4 Health Advisory–Do Not Travel. The Department of State advises U.S. citizens to avoid all international travel due to the global impact of COVID-19. In countries where commercial departure options remain available, U.S. citizens who live in the United States should arrange for immediate return to the United States, unless they are prepared to remain abroad for an indefinite period.

Travel in the United States
There are a no specific advisories or restrictions for travel within the United States. However, a growing number of cases of COVID-19 have been reported in every state, and many areas are experiencing community spread of disease. Crowded travel settings, like airports, may increase your risk of exposure to COVID-19 if there are other travelers with coronavirus. *As such, Mecklenburg County is recommending that residents avoid non-essential travel.*

*What if I recently traveled to an area where COVID-19 is present and got sick?

If you become sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, within 14 days after you left, you should:

- Seek medical advice and call your health care professional or the Public Health Department at 980-314-9400.

- Call ahead before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room. Tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.

- Avoid contact with others.

*Are individuals who develop COVID-19 or who may have been exposed quarantined or isolated?

Yes, there are recommendations for voluntary and mandatory actions depending on the level of risk to our community. For all individuals, staying home when sick is an important step to limit the spread of illness.

Quarantine means separating a person or group of people who have been exposed to a disease but have not developed symptoms from others who have not been exposed, in order to stop the possible spread of that disease. For COVID-19, the period of quarantine is 14 days. Someone who has been

released from COVID-19 quarantine is NOT considered a risk for spreading the virus to others because they have NOT become ill during the 14-day quarantine.

Isolation is reserved for those who are infected and will be required the infection is confirmed. Infected individuals may be isolated in a health care facility or at home (depending on how sick they are) until they are better and will no longer put others at risk.

Children

Are children more likely to get sick from COVID-19 compared to the general population and how can that be prevented?

No, there is no evidence that children are more likely to become ill. In fact, most confirmed cases of COVID-19 have occurred in adults. Illness in children has been reported, including in very young children, but based upon past coronavirus outbreaks, illness among children was relatively uncommon. However, as with other respiratory illnesses, certain populations of children may be at increased risk of severe illness if they have other health conditions.

Do symptoms of COVID-19 differ in children compared with adults?

Limited reports of children with COVID-19 have described cold-like symptoms, such as fever, runny nose, and cough. Symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea have been reported in at least one child with COVID-19. These limited reports suggest that children with confirmed COVID-19 have generally been ill with mild symptoms, and severe complications appear to be uncommon.

Pregnancy

Are pregnant women more likely to become ill or are at increased risk for severe illness or death with COVID-19 compared to the general public?

We do not have information about likelihood of illness of pregnant women to COVID-19. Pregnant women experience many changes which may make them more likely to get respiratory infections, including COVID-19. Pregnant women also might be at risk for severe illness and death compared to the general population as observed in cases of other related coronavirus infections and other respiratory infections, such as influenza, during pregnancy.

Are pregnant women with COVID-19 at increased risk for adverse pregnancy outcomes?

We do not have information on adverse pregnancy outcomes in pregnant women with COVID-19. Pregnancy loss, including miscarriage and stillbirth, has been observed in cases of infection with other related during pregnancy. High fevers during the first trimester of pregnancy can increase the risk of certain birth defects.

Can pregnant women with COVID-19 pass the virus to their fetus or newborn?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly by close contact with an infected person through respiratory droplets. Whether a pregnant woman with COVID-19 can transmit the virus that causes COVID-19 to her fetus or neonate by other routes (before, during, or after delivery) is still unknown.

Are infants born to mothers with COVID-19 during pregnancy at increased risk for adverse outcomes?

Based on limited case reports, adverse infant outcomes (e.g., preterm birth) have been reported among infants born to mothers positive for COVID-19 during pregnancy. However, it is not clear that these outcomes were related to maternal infection, and at this time the risk of adverse infant outcomes is not known.

Is maternal illness with COVID-19 during lactation associated with potential risk to a breastfeeding infant?

In limited case series reported to date, no evidence of virus has been found in the breast milk of women with COVID-19. No information is available on the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 through breast milk (i.e., whether the virus is present in the breast milk of an infected woman). Human-to-human spread by close contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 has been reported and is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when a person with infection coughs or sneezes.

Animals

What about animals or animal products imported from China?

CDC does not have any evidence to prove that animals or animal products that come from China pose a risk for spreading COVID-19 in the United States.

Should I be concerned about pets or other animals and COVID-19?

While this virus seems to have come from an animal source, it is now spreading from person-to-person in China. There is no reason to think that any animals including pets in the United States might be a source of illness with this new coronavirus. To date, CDC has not received any reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19. At this time, there is no evidence that companion animals including pets can spread COVID-19.

Should someone who is sick avoid contact with pets or other animals, if they are sick with COVID-19?

You should limit contact with pets and other animals while you are sick with COVID-19, just like you would around other people. Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus.

Mecklenburg County Public Health Response/Preparedness Efforts

*What is Mecklenburg County Public Health doing to respond to COVID-19?

- Since the outbreak was first identified, MCPH has been preparing for potential COVID-19 cases by working with and following guidance from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). MCPH also continues to work locally with other health departments, first responders, health care providers and community partners to closely monitor COVID-19 and review and update existing emergency response plans.

- Public Health staff is also working diligently to continue to implement the most up to date prevention efforts based on guidance from the CDC and the NC Division of Public Health.

*Where can I find more resources?

- Additional information and resources (including COVID-19 Poster and a link to this FAQ) is available at MeckHealthNC.gov.

- Mecklenburg County Public Health has also established a call line to answer general questions: 980-314-9400.

- Additional information regarding COVID-19 can also be found at the CDC's website here.

Businesses and Employers Guidance

Mecklenburg County Public Health is working with the CDC and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services to respond to COVID-19. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illness in animals and humans. Human coronaviruses commonly circulate in the United States and usually cause mild illnesses like the common cold. Coronaviruses like COVID-19 are most often spread through the air by coughing or sneezing, through close personal contact (including touching and shaking hands) or through touching your nose, mouth or eyes before washing your hands.

The following interim guidance may help prevent workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, in non-healthcare settings. Additional guidance is available from the [CDC](#) and [N.C. Department of Health and Human Services](#).

Who is at an increased risk of infection?
The CDC has identified specific criteria to identify individuals who are at increased risk due to COVID-19 and should be tested. Please call your healthcare provider or the public health department at 980-314-9400 if you are experiencing symptoms of fever, cough or shortness of breath and you have been in an area with community transmitssion or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19. North Carolina and Mecklenburg County are currently experiencing community transmission of COVID-19.

Should we exclude staff who have interacted with a contact to a potential COVID-19 case?
At this time, you do not need to exclude staff because they have had interaction with a contact to a potential case. CDC guidelines indicate there is little to no risk of being infected in this instance.

What can we do now?
While much remains unclear about COVID-19 as to the contagiousness of the disease and its effects, employers should take steps to avoid putting employees in situations where they are at elevated risk of exposure.

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds at a time.
- Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, and hand hygiene at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.
- Stop handshaking –use other noncontact methods of greeting
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
- Clean hands at the door and schedule regular hand washing reminders by email
- Disinfect surfaces like doorknobs, tables, desks, and handrails regularly
- Increase ventilation by opening windows or adjusting air conditioning

Is any specific population or ethnicity at risk of infection?
No one group, ethnicity or population in the U.S. is at a higher risk for getting coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) than others.

Who is most at risk of getting ill?
Early information shows that older adults and people with serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, or lung disease are at higher risk of getting very sick. If you have employees who fall into one or more of these categories, consider their current work assignments and whether they put them at a greater risk for falling ill.

What if an employee calls in sick?

- Actively encourage sick employees to stay home.
- Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance.
- Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work.
- Be flexible with employees who need to stay home with a sick family member.

What if someone comes to work sick or becomes sick at work?
The CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately.

What about teleworking or working from home?
Review policies and procedures for remote or teleworking where possible. Cross-train employees for key functions so that daily schedules can continue relatively uninterrupted by potential employee absences. Review absenteeism policies to make sure employees are not being encouraged to come to work if they are sick.

Should we limit employee travel?
Employers should strongly encourage their workers to avoid all nonessential travel. Employers with business requiring travel should consider reasonable alternatives for their workers, such as videoconferencing. The State Department has issued a Level 4 Warning advising all Americans againg all international travel.

Where can an employee get screened or tested?
Anyone who feels sick with fever, cough or has difficulty breathing should call ahead to a healthcare professional or the health department.l. Currently, testing is not recommended for asymptomatic individuals.

Does an employee who was quarantined for 14 days due to travel to high risk areas as recommended by the CDC or a known exposure to COVID-19 need a negative test to return to work?
Someone who has been released from COVID-19 quarantine is not considered a risk for spreading the virus to others because they have not developed illness during the incubation period