

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions
Updated March 15, 2020

Q: What are coronaviruses and what is COVID-19?

A: Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some causing illness in people and others that circulate among animals, including camels, cats and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can evolve and infect people and then spread between people such as has been seen with recent outbreaks of MERS and SARS. The most recently discovered coronavirus is COVID-19, which is an infectious disease that was unknown before an outbreak in Wuhan, China in December 2019.

Q: Is there a special information phone number for people to call with additional questions about COVID-19?

A: Yes. Louisiana 211 is partnering with the Louisiana Department of Health to ensure citizens access to the most current information available for COVID-19. Simply dial 211 or text LACOVID to 898-211.

Q: How many cases of COVID-19 are there in Louisiana?

A: The Louisiana Department of Health is reporting cases of COVID-19 at ldh.la.gov/Coronavirus. The website is updated twice daily, at 9:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. To date, most cases have been clustered in the New Orleans area.

Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

A: For confirmed COVID-19 infections, reported illnesses have ranged from infected people with little to no symptoms (similar to the common cold) to people being severely ill and dying. Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath/difficulty breathing

Q: How would I become infected with COVID-19?

A: COVID-19 can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth when a person infected with the disease coughs or exhales. These droplets can land on objects or surfaces, and can then be transmitted from a surface when a person touches it and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth. People can also become infected if they breathe in the droplets from the person who has COVID-19. This is why it's important to stay at least 6 feet away from an infected person.

Q: How can I help protect myself?

A: The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus. There are simple everyday precautions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses. These include:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. If a tissue is not available, cough into your elbow.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Q: Who is at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19?

A: Older adults and people who have severe chronic medical conditions such as heart, lung or kidney disease seem to be at higher risk for more serious COVID-19 illness.

Q: What is the risk to children?

A: There is no evidence that children are more susceptible to COVID-19. In fact, most confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported from China have occurred in adults. Infections in children have been reported, including in very young children, but there are no presumptive positive cases in children in Louisiana. There is an ongoing investigation to determine more about how this outbreak affects children.

Q: Is COVID-19 fatal?

A: While people have died from COVID-19 in the U.S. and abroad, the majority of people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 do recover. The virus appears to only be severe if it reaches the lungs and remains untreated. Most otherwise healthy people can recover from COVID-19 at home.

Q: How do I know to get tested?

A: If you are experiencing symptoms such as fever, cough or shortness of breath, contact your primary care physician for guidance. The Department of Health recommends COVID-19 testing for any patient with fever, respiratory symptoms and a negative influenza test. After a test, all patients should remain isolated until they are cleared by a physician or public health official. If you do not have a doctor or if you do not have insurance, contact your nearest community health clinic. This website lists all of these clinics: www.lpca.net/main/for-patients/find-a-health-center.

Q: What is Louisiana's testing capability?

A: Louisiana has a testing capability of several hundred patients. This number changes constantly as test kits are used up and more arrive. The Office of Public Health has ordered additional testing kits from the CDC and has been pleased that they arrived in a timely fashion.

Currently, the samples are coming to the OPH from provider referrals and are being accepted based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. Commercial testing is now also available, and any positive private lab tests that come back positive will be verified at the OPH lab in Baton Rouge and confirmed by the CDC lab in Atlanta.

Q: What should I do if I have come into contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19?

A: You should self-isolate and limit your contact with other people and you should contact your primary care physician for guidance. If you develop a fever and a cough, you should contact your doctor.

Q: Should I go to the ER?

A: You should go to the ER if you are seriously ill (difficulty breathing, confusion, dehydrated). If you are sick with typical cold symptoms, call your primary care doctor.

Q: What is the latest on the state's response to COVID-19?

A: On March 13, Governor John Bel Edwards declared a public health emergency in Louisiana. This makes certain resources available to state agencies and local governments to assist them in responding to outbreaks of COVID-19. That declaration includes protections against price gouging and bans state employees from international travel to Level 2 and Level 3 countries as designated by the CDC.

Additionally, the Louisiana Department of Health has ordered health care facilities in the state, including hospitals and nursing homes, to restrict visitors to those deemed essential, vital or necessary to the care and well-being of patients, clients and residents.

Also on March 13, the Governor signed a proclamation that immediately halts any gathering of more than 250 people until Monday, April 13. This limitation includes the closure of all K-12 public schools statewide effective March 16, and it limits church services to gatherings to 250 people or fewer.

Separately on March 13, the governor postponed the April 4 elections until June and July.

Mirroring the federal government's response, we have moved from a 'containment' approach in which we focused on travelers to a 'mitigation' approach in which we anticipate and plan for person-to-person transmission in the community. We are focused on state and local government preparedness and are providing support to health care providers, schools, businesses and community members to ensure they are adequately prepared to take action to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Q: Does the state's restricted visitors policy mean no visitors can enter a health care facility?

A: No. Health care facilities can allow visitors at their discretion, in consultation with families and responsible parties. This order also doesn't apply to situations involving end-of-life care. However, no one who meets the definition of a "restricted person" can be allowed in a health care facility.

Q: Can children still get school meals?

A: Yes, according to the Governor's recent order. It requires schools to use appropriate social distancing measures and continue to provide meals or other essential services with applicable staff. Parents should contact their child's school for specific instructions.

Q: Is it safe to receive a package from any area where COVID-19 has been reported?

A: Yes. The likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low and the risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, traveled, and exposed to different conditions and temperature is also low.

Q: Are you in regular contact with the federal government?

A: Yes. We are in constant contact with the CDC and HHS. On March 12, the Governor and other state officials met with U.S. Surgeon General Jerome M. Adams, M.D. In addition, we have standing calls across state health departments and a standing call internally in Louisiana. This is all very important so that we all have the latest data, are on the same page and can adapt our plans as conditions change.