COVID-19 – How to protect yourself

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is caused by a novel coronavirus, which means this virus has not been found before. However, we know that the virus transmits mainly via (a) direct contact with droplets from an infected person; and (b) indirect contact by touching contaminated surfaces where the virus can survive for a short time.

People living in the European Region should follow one main rule: protect yourself and others from getting sick by adhering to the guidance you receive from your public health authorities and WHO and stay healthy while travelling.

People should adopt simple steps of hand and respiratory hygiene that also help to avoid influenza and a broad range of illnesses. It is critical that people get their information from reliable sources to counter the many rumours that are influencing their ability to do the right thing.

- World Health Organization
    - [Regional Office for Europe: news updates, travel advice and protective measures for Europe](#)
    - [Headquarters: latest global updates and advice](#)

Two things will surely not protect your health and they are stigma and discrimination of people based on their skin color, ethnicity or culture. It is important that we all realize this is the time for solidarity and cooperation, the time to work together to protect the health of everyone.
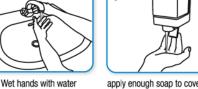
Tips for everybody

Clean your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub.

- **Why?** If there is a virus on your hands, cleaning them with alcohol-based hand rub or with soap and water will kill it.
- **What does 'frequently' mean?** 10 important moments to clean your hands are:
  1. After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.
  2. Before and after caring for someone sick.
  3. Before, during and after preparing food.
  4. Before eating food.
  5. Before and after treating a cut or wound.
  6. After using the toilet.
  7. After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet.
  8. After touching an animal, animal feed or animal waste.
  9. After handling pet food or pet treats.
  10. After touching garbage.
- **What is the best way to wash my hands?** Washing your hands should take about as long as singing "Happy Birthday" two times.

0 Wet hands with water

1 apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces.

2 Rub hands palm to palm

3 right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa

4 palm to palm with fingers interlaced

5 backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked

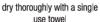**6** rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa

7 rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa.

8 Rinse hands with water

9 dry thoroughly with a single use towel

10 use towel to turn off faucet

11 ...and your hands are safe.

When you cough or sneeze: cover your mouth and nose with a flexed elbow or a tissue. Throw the tissue away into a closed bin and clean your hands as described above.

- **Why?** This will stop germs and viruses from spreading through the air and on surfaces. If you sneeze or cough into your hands, you may contaminate objects or people that you touch.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

- **Why?** If there is a virus on your hands, for example because you were close to a sick person, you can infect yourself when you touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

Keep social distance: maintain 1–2 metres distance between yourself and a sick person.

- **Why?** When someone sneezes or coughs, small droplets carrying the virus can project resulting in one becoming contaminated with the person's secretions if a certain distance is not maintained.

Tips for travellers

If travelling to China

Stay aware of the latest information and take care of your health and follow all the above tips.

Avoid consumption of raw or undercooked animal products.

- **Why?** Cross-contamination with uncooked, contaminated foods can happen, so it is important to handle raw meat, milk or animal organs with care, as per good food safety practices.

Avoid any contact with animals in markets.

- **Why?** An animal source is the most likely primary source of this outbreak, and people could become infected through contact with animals. Also avoid contact with potentially contaminated animal waste or fluids on the soil or structures of shops and market facilities.

Seek medical care early if you have fever, cough and difficulty in breathing, and share previous travel history with your health care provider.

- **Why?** Whenever you have fever, cough and difficulty in breathing, it is important to seek medical attention promptly as this may be due to COVID-19 or another serious condition. Call ahead if possible to allow health staff to take precautions and prepare for your arrival.

If returning from China

Keep an eye on yourself for any symptoms of COVID-19. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty in breathing in the 14 days following your return, seek medical care early and share your recent travel history with the health care provider.

Why? Fever, cough and difficulty in breathing may be a sign of COVID-19.

Use of face masks

When to use face masks

If you *do not* have a cough, fever and difficulty in breathing, you do not need to wear a medical mask.

- **Why?** There is no evidence that masks protect you from getting sick but wearing one when you are healthy can have negative effects. For example, the mask may give you a false sense of

security, and let you forget to take other important actions like washing your hands. Additionally, there may not be enough masks for healthcare workers or sick people.

If you *do* have a cough, a fever and difficulty in breathing, and you or someone close to you recently visited China, wear a medical mask properly: see tips below.

How to use face masks

Once you establish that you need a mask (see above), it is important to wear it properly. If you do not wear a mask correctly, you can be at even higher risk of infection.

Also remember: a mask alone will not provide full protection for yourself or people around you, so you still will have to follow all the "simple tips" on hand and respiratory hygiene.

Putting the mask on

- Place the mask carefully to cover your mouth and nose.
- Tie the mask to minimize gaps between your face and the mask.
- While wearing it, do not touch the mask – especially the front.
- If you accidentally touch the mask, clean your hands.

Removing the mask

- Remove the lace from behind without touching the front.
- Remove or untie the bottom string first.
- Put single-use masks in a plastic bag, close it and throw it in the trash bin immediately after you remove it.
- Wash your hands after removal or if you touch a used mask by accident.
- When your mask becomes damp or humid, replace it with a new clean, dry one.
- Do not re-use a single-use mask.