

COVID-19

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease that was first identified in humans in 2019. It is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Most people who have COVID-19 have mild symptoms. But COVID-19 can also cause severe illness and death. People can also be infected and never have symptoms. Some groups have a higher risk of severe COVID-19 disease, especially unvaccinated older adults and unvaccinated people who have [certain medical conditions](#). In addition, some vaccinated people are at higher risk, especially those who have [weak immune systems](#). Some people experience post-COVID conditions. This includes a wide range of new or returning symptoms or ongoing health problems that can last for weeks or months. Even people who did not have symptoms at first can experience post-COVID conditions. See [CDC Post-COVID Conditions](#).

What are coronavirus variants?

Like all viruses, SARS-CoV-2 changes constantly through mutation. These mutations add up and create slightly different versions of the virus, called “variants”. Sometimes, a mutation will result in the virus spreading more easily, making people sicker or making it resistant to treatment or vaccines. Currently, the CDC has found that all 3 vaccines authorized for use in the U.S. are very effective at preventing serious illness and death from variants, including the Omicron variant. However, the Omicron variant is able to cause breakthrough infections in people who are fully vaccinated, especially if they have not received a booster dose.

For more information, see the CDC webpage [What You Need to Know About Variants](#).

How is COVID-19 spread?

The SARS-CoV-2 virus spreads from person to person mainly through respiratory droplets that are released into the air by a person who has COVID-19. For example, when they speak, sing, cough, shout, sneeze, or breathe heavily. These droplets are then breathed in by other people or land in their nose, mouth, or eyes. A person’s risk of getting infected goes up the closer they are to someone with COVID-19. Enclosed places with poor air flow increase the risk of getting infected. This is because the droplets that have the virus can concentrate and spread in the air past 6 feet. They can even stay floating in the air after an infected person has left the room. It is also possible, but less common, for the virus to spread by touching a surface with droplets on it and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. See the CDC webpage [How COVID-19 spreads](#).

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms of COVID-19 may include one or more of the following: fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or trouble breathing, feeling tired, muscle or body aches, headache, sore throat, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, stuffy or runny nose, or new loss of taste or smell. Some people with COVID-19 infection never get symptoms. Talk to your doctor about any of these or other symptoms that worry you. If you need help finding a doctor, call the 24/7 helpline at 2-1-1 or visit the [211LA.org](#). To learn about symptoms & what to do if you are sick, visit [ph.lacounty.gov/covidcare](#).

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When should I get tested for COVID-19?

You should get a swab or saliva test for COVID-19 even if you are fully vaccinated and/or boosted, including:

- If you have symptoms of COVID-19
- If you are a close contact¹ to someone with COVID-19
- If you have traveled internationally or to areas in the US where COVID-19 is spreading quickly
- As an extra layer of protection to protect others from getting sick, such as before and after attending a gathering or event.

Testing may be required depending on where you work, study, or live. Visit ph.lacounty.gov/covidtests for more about when to get a test. Make an appointment for free testing at covid19.lacounty.gov/testing or call 2-1-1.

What if I test positive for COVID-19?

This means the test detected the COVID-19 virus. It is very likely you have COVID-19 and could spread it to others. You must isolate (stay away from others) for at least 5 days. How long you have to isolate depends on whether you have symptoms and if you get a negative follow-up viral test on Day 5 or later. If you do not get a negative test on Day 5 or later, you must stay in isolation for 10 full days. Follow the isolation instructions closely at ph.lacounty.gov/covidisolation.

You must wear a mask around others, indoors and outdoors, for a total of 10 days. This includes around household members. See ph.lacounty.gov/masks for more information.

- Adults should wear a well-fitting medical grade mask (surgical or N95 or KN95 respirator).
- Children should wear a well-fitting, non-cloth mask of multiple layers of non-woven material with a nose wire.

You must also tell all your close contacts that they have been exposed. They could be infected and must quarantine unless they are exempt. Give them the [instructions for close contacts](https://ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine), available in multiple languages at ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine. Close contacts must follow the instructions even if they feel well or are vaccinated.

Learn more about tests results at [Understanding Your Viral Test Result](https://ph.lacounty.gov/covidtests) on ph.lacounty.gov/covidtests.

What if I have been in close contact to someone with COVID-19?

If you are a close contact¹ to someone with COVID-19 you must follow [all instructions](https://ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine) even if you feel well or are vaccinated. You will need to quarantine unless you are exempt*. You must monitor your health and wear a well-fitting mask around others indoors and outdoors for 10 days after your last contact with the infected person.

¹ A "close contact" is any of the following people who were exposed to you while you were infectious*:

- a. Any person who was within 6 feet of you for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period
- b. Any person who had unprotected contact with your body fluids and/or secretions. For example, you coughed or sneezed on them, you shared utensils, a cup, or saliva with them, or they cared for you without wearing appropriate protective equipment.

*You are considered to be infectious (meaning you can spread COVID-19 to others) starting 2 days before your symptoms began until your isolation ends. If you test positive for COVID-19 but do not have any symptoms, you are considered to be infectious from 2 days before your test was taken until your isolation ends.

Frequently Asked Questions

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For more details, including how long to quarantine, see the [instructions for close contacts](https://ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine) at ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine.

*Quarantine exemptions: You do not need to quarantine if you have no symptoms of COVID-19 AND you are up to date on your COVID-19 vaccines OR if you tested positive using a viral test for COVID-19 within the last 90 days and recovered. (Recovered means you completed the isolation period for your COVID-19 infection.)

When Am I Up to Date on My COVID-19 Vaccines?

You are up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines when you are fully vaccinated and, when eligible, have received your booster dose. See [COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility](#) summary table.

You are considered **fully vaccinated** against COVID-19 two (2) weeks after completing your primary series. This means 2 weeks after:

- You got a single dose of Johnson & Johnson (J&J)/Janssen COVID-19 vaccine, or
- You got a second dose of a Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, or
- You finished the series of a COVID-19 vaccine that has been listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization².

You are eligible for a **booster dose**:

- 2 months after your J&J COVID-19 vaccine
- 5 months after your last dose of your Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine*
- 5 months after your last dose of your Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

See ph.lacounty.gov/fullyvax for more information including other alternative vaccination series that are considered fully vaccinated.

How can I get vaccinated against COVID-19?

COVID-19 vaccinations are widely available across LA County without an appointment. Visit www.VaccinateLACounty.com and click on “[How To Get Vaccinated](#)” to find a location near you. If you need help making an appointment, need transportation to a vaccination site, or are homebound, you can call **1-833-540-0473** from 8am to 8:30pm 7 days a week. Information is also available in multiple languages 24/7 by calling 2-1-1. Vaccinations are always free and available to everyone age 5 and over, regardless of immigration status.

² The WHO Emergency Use Listing (EUL) includes the following COVID-19 vaccines: Pfizer-BioNTech (BNT162b2, COMIRNATY, Tozinameran), Moderna (mRNA 1273, Takeda, Spikevax), Johnson & Johnson/Janssen(Ad26.COV2.S), AstraZeneca-Oxford ([ChAdOx1-S (recombinant)], AZD1222, Vaxzevria), Serum Institute of India (Covishield, Covovax), BIPP (Sinopharm), Sinovac (CoronaVac), Bharat Biotech International (e.g., BBV152, COVAXIN), and Novavax (Nuvaxovid). See WHO [website](#) for the most current list.

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How can I protect myself and others from getting COVID-19?

Stopping this pandemic is going to take all our tools.

- **Get vaccinated and get a booster when you are eligible.** It is the best way to protect against COVID-19. Vaccination will slow the spread of variants and lower the chances that new, even more dangerous variants emerge.
- **Wear a mask that fits and filters well.** See ph.lacounty.gov/masks for more information.
- **Avoid places where COVID-19 spreads more easily,** including crowded places, closed spaces with poor air flow, and settings where people are talking close together.
- **Improve air flow.** Open windows and doors and avoid indoor spaces with poor air flow. See [COVID-19 & Indoor Air Quality at Home Ventilation Tips](#) for more information.
- **Choose outdoor spaces** for social and fitness activities.
- **Wash your hands and/or use hand sanitizer often.** Especially after being in public spaces where surfaces are touched by many people.
- **Stay home when you are sick.**

See ph.lacounty.gov/reducerisk for more tips.

Can I travel?

Do not travel if you are sick or are in either isolation or quarantine. If you are up to date on your vaccines, you can travel. If you are not, it is best to defer travel until you are fully vaccinated and boosted, if eligible. If you do choose to travel, you should follow the CDC [domestic](#) or [international](#) travel guidance. Depending on whether you are vaccinated and where you are traveling, you may need to test pre and post travel and quarantine upon return from travel. See the LAC DPH [Travel Advisory and Guidance](#) for more details.

I'm still feeling stressed about COVID-19 – what can I do?

As the world continues to combat COVID-19, you may feel concerned, worried, and fearful for your health and the health of your loved ones, financial troubles, lifestyle changes and other factors may also cause added stress. Be sure to watch for signs of distress, engage in regular self-care, and seek out help when needed.

If you or someone you know is having a hard time coping, help is available 24/7 by calling the LA County Department of Mental Health's Helpline 1-800-854-7771. You can also text "LA" to 741741 or talk to your doctor. The webpage <http://dmh.lacounty.gov/resources> includes tips to help manage stress and improve your emotional health.

LA County residents have free access to iPrevail.com, an online mental health resource to help with life's everyday stressors. After a short assessment, you are connected to customized support which may include on-demand chat with peer coaches, self-paced lessons to improve wellbeing, and community support groups. iPrevail is available 24/7 offered in English and Spanish.

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Where can I get reliable information about COVID-19?

There is a lot of misinformation about COVID-19. Check trusted sources for accurate information about COVID-19, including the following:

- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health: COVID-19 information: ph.lacounty.gov/Coronavirus
- COVID-19 vaccination:
 - [VaccinateLACounty.com](https://vaccinate.lacounty.gov) for [FAQs and factsheets](#), information on [How to Get Vaccinated](#), and more.
 - DPH Vaccine Call Center **1-833-540-0473** 8am to 8:30pm daily or **2-1-1** (open 24/7) for help with getting vaccinated.
- [California Department of Public Health](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)

Look out for COVID-19 scams

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, scammers are still at work to cheat people out of money. To learn more about how to avoid a scam and what to do if you are a victim of a scam, visit the DPH [COVID-19 Scams and Fraud](#) webpage.