

Staying Safe as the Country Reopens

As businesses, court houses, schools and more open back up, many people are still unsure how to protect themselves and their loved ones from COVID-19. It is important to know that there is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19, but there are many steps you can take to protect yourself and those around you.

According to the CDC, COVID-19 is spread mainly from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. If a person is infected with COVID-19, these infected droplets are released into the air when that person coughs, sneezes, or talks. People within six feet of each other are more vulnerable to these droplets landing in their mouths or noses and may even be inhaled into their lungs. These droplets may also land on your hands and be transmitted into your system when you touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. While some people with this disease may not show any symptoms or even feel sick, they may still be carrying it and can transmit it to those around them.

The best preventative measures you can take to protect yourself and those around you are to:

1. Wear a mask;
2. Wash your hands regularly; and
3. Practice social distancing.

1. Wear a Mask

Regardless of whether you feel sick or not, you should wear a face mask when out in public or around others. There are a few exceptions. First, children under two years of age should not wear face masks because it increases the risk of suffocation. Also, those who have difficulty breathing or other disabilities may be unable to wear a face mask. Because these individuals cannot wear face masks, it is even more important that everyone around them does.

For everyone else who should wear a face mask, the question then becomes: "How do I wear one?" Facemasks should be worn in a way that covers both your mouth and nose to prevent respiratory droplets from getting in or out. (Note that

respiratory droplets of others who are not wearing masks may still land on your person and potentially infect you if you fail to take other necessary precautions.) Another important question is: “What kind of masks are safe to wear?” N95 masks, disposable masks, and cloth masks are all safe to wear and can be effective in slowing the spread of infection. Surgical masks and N95 masks are intended to be disposable, whereas cloth masks can be washed and reused.

2. Wash Your Hands Regularly

When washing your hands, scrub with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or the length of the song “Happy Birthday.” You should wash your hands before, during, and after preparing food, before you eat, after you use the restroom or blow your nose, after coughing or sneezing, after caring for someone who is sick, after touching animals, and periodically throughout the day after touching surfaces others may have touched. Hand sanitizer is not a substitute for washing your hands, but it is effective in killing bacteria and its use is encouraged. Hand sanitizers should be alcohol-based and should contain at least 60% alcohol.

3. Practice Social Distancing

Social distancing protects you from becoming sick by keeping you away from others who might be sick. You should only leave your house when necessary.

When you do go out in public, stay six feet apart from others. Staying six feet apart lessens the chances of you coming into contact with the respiratory droplets of others around you. You should also limit gatherings of people to no more than ten.

It may be difficult to stay home, and there are legitimate reasons to leave your home. Many stores and businesses have taken extra precautions to encourage social distancing by offering delivery services for low or no cost to you, in addition to limiting the number of people that may enter a place of business at any given time. Many places are also requiring that patrons wear face masks while inside their business.

Taking these few, easy steps will reduce your chances of getting sick and will reduce the risk of spreading the virus to those around you.

For more information, visit TNSeniorLaw.org and cdc.gov.

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