



Coronavirus

A Guide for USW Members

COVID-19, the disease caused by the new, or “novel” coronavirus, is spreading rapidly in the USA and Canada. Not everyone exposed gets sick, and most of those who get sick make a full recovery. But the virus is more dangerous than other respiratory diseases, like the flu. The chance of a serious infection goes up with the amount of exposure, age, and other health problems, especially heart and lung problems, and diabetes. Here are some simple precautions that will reduce the likelihood of contracting the virus.

- **Wash your hands thoroughly and often.** Hands should be scrubbed for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. If possible, they should be dried with paper towels, not blowers, which can spread droplets. It's especially important to wash after touching objects or surfaces that many others have touched, like doorknobs and elevator buttons. It's also important to wash as soon as you get home after being in a public place.
- **Use hand sanitizer when you can't wash.** Hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol kills germs and viruses, if it touches them. But it does a poor job of removing dirt, where pathogens can hide. Don't use vodka or other spirits. Anything under 120 proof won't do a proper job.
- **Disinfect surfaces which might be touched by the public.** Proper disinfectants are based on alcohol or chlorine, and are labeled as killing 99.9% of germs and viruses. It's not necessary to frequently clean surfaces that only you touch or objects at home so long as no potentially infected person has touched or coughed on them.
- **Try not to touch your face with potentially contaminated hands.** Some infections come from airborne droplets, but most people become infected when they touch their face after touching a

More information is available at
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contaminated surface. Under the right conditions the virus can live for up to 4 days on a surface. Indoor surfaces are worse than outdoor surfaces, since the UV-radiation in sunlight is a disinfectant. It's hard not to touch your face. Frequent washing helps. A good strategy is to keep a box of tissues or wipes handy and put one over your fingers if you need to touch surfaces or your face.

- **Practice social distancing.** Avoid crowds! Avoid public places as much as possible. Don't shake hands. In public, try to stay 6 feet away from other people.
- **If you're sick, stay home.** The symptoms of COVID-19 are a dry cough of unknown origin, fever, and sometimes, shortness of breath. If you know the reason for the cough, for example asthma or an allergy, and you have no other symptoms; it's unlikely to be COVID-19. But any other cough or symptom should trigger a call to your physician and, in the case of a cough plus a fever, a call to the health department for a COVID-19 test. If the symptoms become severe you may need to go to the hospital, but call first, so the hospital is prepared.
- **If you've been around a person known to have tested positive for coronavirus, stay home.** Many employers are establishing policies requiring or allowing this, and are paying people for the time off. You may have legal protections too. If your employer retaliates against you or threatens to, let the union know right away.
- **In fact, stay home if you can – even if you feel OK, and haven't knowingly been exposed.** Most state governors have issued orders requiring non-essential workplaces to shut down, and for

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people to work from home if possible. This is essential to blocking transmission of the virus and ultimately ending the pandemic with as little loss of life as possible.

- **If you have to be at work, take precautions, and through the union push your employer to do the same.** Precautions include checking for symptoms, minimizing the need to touch surfaces others have touched, frequent hand washing and surface sanitation, and more. For more information, go to the Coronavirus Resource Page on the USW's website, www.usw.org.
- **Avoid unnecessary travel.** If you absolutely have to travel, it's safer by car than by air, since airports involve large crowds from many different regions.
- **Wear a mask when around other people. But don't think it makes you safe.** Surgical masks and homemade cloth masks are designed to catch coughs and sneezes by the person wearing the mask. They don't protect that person from exposure. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now suggests that we wear such masks in public, as a way of protecting each other. There are lots of instructions on the internet for do-it-yourself masks. Filtering respirators, like the N95, provide protection to people trained to use them properly and who don't have facial hair, but they are in short supply and should be reserved for health care workers who are exposed to infected patients.
- **Get a flu shot, if you haven't already.** The flu vaccine does not protect you from coronavirus. But having the flu along with coronavirus is especially dangerous. This would also be a good time to review all your vaccinations with your physician, and make sure they're up to date.

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- **In general, err on the side of caution.** You can't live your life in fear. But you can take reasonable steps to protect yourself and those around you.
- **Don't believe the myths.** :Some of those myths include:
 - It's a government or a Chinese conspiracy. **FALSE**
 - Ethnic Asians carry the disease. **FALSE**
 - Packages from China and Chinese food are unsafe. **FALSE**
 - Pets can spread the virus. **FALSE**
 - Antibiotics can treat it, **FALSE**
 - Certain foods or supplements can prevent or treat it. **FALSE**
 - It will die out in warmer weather. (Other viruses, like flu, are seasonal.) **MAYBE**, but don't count on it.

Stay up to date. You can check reputable websites, like the ones below, and news organizations, like the major networks and CNN. (Not Fox News, which has spread misinformation.) A few other links are below. And check the USW website for updated information.

- **And finally, keep our brave health care workers and first responders in your thoughts and prayers.** Many are union members. All of them are fighting hard to protect us, often at risk of their own health. They are the heroes of this pandemic.

Other links for more information:

The AFL-CIO: www.aflcio/covid-19

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
Understand, however, that the guidelines are the minimum that should be done. Some of them are designed for emergency shortages of protective equipment and testing.

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OSHA: www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/

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