Under Governor Larry Hogan’s direction, state agencies continue to develop comprehensive and coordinated prevention and response plans for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) will communicate directly with the public, providing updates as this situation develops and accurate information about how to protect yourself and your family.

If you have questions about COVID-19 that are not answered here, call your local health department or dial 2-1-1.

What is COVID-19?
COVID-19 is a disease caused by a respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019. COVID-19 is a new virus that hasn’t caused illness in humans before. Worldwide, COVID-19 has resulted in thousands of infections, causing illness and in some cases death. Cases have spread to countries throughout the world, with more cases reported daily.

How does COVID-19 spread?
COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through close contact from person to person, including between people who are physically near each other (within about 6 feet). People who are infected but do not show symptoms can also spread the virus to others.

- COVID-19 most commonly spreads during close contact
  - People who are physically near (within 6 feet) a person with COVID-19 or have direct contact with that person are at greatest risk of infection.
  - When people with COVID-19 cough, sneeze, sing, talk, or breathe they produce respiratory droplets.
  - Infections occur mainly through exposure to respiratory droplets when a person is in close contact with someone who has COVID-19.
  - Respiratory droplets cause infection when they are inhaled or deposited on mucous membranes, such as those that line the inside of the nose and mouth.
- COVID-19 can sometimes be spread by airborne transmission
○ There is evidence that under certain conditions, people with COVID-19 seem to have infected others who were more than 6 feet away within enclosed spaces that had inadequate ventilation.
○ The amount of infectious smaller droplet and particles produced by the people with COVID-19 became concentrated enough to spread the virus to other people. The people who were infected were in the same space during the same time or shortly after the person with COVID-19 had left.
○ Available data indicate that it is much more common for the virus that causes COVID-19 to spread through close contact with a person who has COVID-19 than through airborne transmission.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?
Symptoms, or combinations of symptoms, that may appear 2-14 days after exposure include:

● Fever or chills
● Cough
● Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
● Fatigue
● Muscle or body aches
● Headache
● New loss of taste or smell
● Sore throat
● Congestion or runny nose
● Nausea or vomiting
● Diarrhea

What is the current COVID-19 situation in Maryland?
Up-to-date information about testing and case counts in Maryland is available at coronavirus.maryland.gov. The page is updated daily.

On May 13, Governor Larry Hogan announced the beginning of Stage One of the ‘Maryland Strong: Roadmap to Recovery,’ which includes moving from a Stay at Home order to a Safer at Home public health advisory and the gradual reopening of retail, manufacturing, houses of worship, and some personal services. On June 5, Maryland moved into Stage Two of recovery with the safe and gradual reopening of workplaces and non-essential businesses. Additional reopenings through Stage Two were announced on June 10, which allowed indoor dining and outdoor amusements to resume on June 12.

On Friday, September 5, Maryland moved from Stage Two to Stage Three of the ‘Maryland Strong: Roadmap to Recovery’ with additional safe and gradual reopenings of most activities with social distancing and face covering requirements. Stage Three will be implemented in multiple phases with a flexible, community-based approach that empowers individual jurisdictions to make decisions regarding the timing of reopenings. For the reopening status of Maryland’s jurisdictions, please visit https://governor.maryland.gov/recovery/.

Marylanders are advised to heed all state and local public health guidance:
• Older people, and those who and have underlying health conditions which put them at greater risk for COVID-19 are advised to avoid crowds
• Everyone should continue wearing masks or face coverings in public areas, businesses, and on public transportation
• Marylanders should continue practicing physical distancing, staying six feet apart when possible

On October 1, Governor Hogan announced additional relaxing of rules on visitation in nursing homes. Indoor visitation may resume at Maryland nursing homes where no new cases have been reported in 14 days or more. He also detailed greater flexibility for compassionate care visits, and an additional $6 million specifically for testing nursing home staff. More information is available here.

Information about the Hogan administration’s ongoing response to COVID-19 is available at https://governor.maryland.gov/coronavirus/.

Do older adults have a higher risk of becoming more seriously ill from COVID-19?
Older adults (age 60+) and those with pre-existing medical conditions have a greater risk for serious illness, and in some cases death, if they become infected with COVID-19. Examples of pre-existing medical conditions include: cancer, diabetes, heart disease or other conditions that impact the immune system’s ability to fight germs.

If you are an older adult or you have one or more chronic health conditions, you can take action to reduce your risk of exposure to COVID-19:

• Take everyday precautions to keep space between yourself and others
• Keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash your hands often with soap and water or hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol content
• Avoid crowds as much as possible

Should I wear a face mask?
On September 1, Gov. Hogan announced further amendments to the statewide masking order that has been in effect since April 18. All Marylanders over age 5 should continue wearing face coverings in indoor public areas, retail stores, outdoors when unable to maintain social distancing, and on public transportation. Face coverings are also required in offices of physicians and dentists, hospitals, pharmacies, and laboratories; and at work in any area where interaction with others is likely such as shared areas of commercial offices. Face coverings should cover both your nose and your chin to properly protect against infection. Read the order at https://governor.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Gatherings-12th-AMENDED-9.1.20.pdf

Masks and face coverings can be made from household items and include wearing a scarf or bandanna that covers the nose and mouth. The CDC has detailed guidance and instructions regarding homemade masks and face coverings available at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html
Masks and face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. People with disabilities who are unable to wear a mask are provided reasonable accommodations per the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The masks and face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance. The CDC has also advised that face coverings with ventilators should be avoided.

**Should I cancel plans to travel?**

MDH issued a public health advisory for out-of-state travel. Under the advisory, Marylanders are strongly advised against traveling to states with positivity rates of 10% or higher. Anyone traveling from these states should get tested and self-quarantine while awaiting results.

The public health advisory applies to personal, family, or business travel of any kind. Marylanders are advised to postpone or cancel travel to these areas until their positivity rates decline. Read the travel advisory at [https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/Documents/07.29.2020%20-%20MDH%20Notice%20-%20Out%20of%20State%20Travel%20Advisory.pdf](https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/Documents/07.29.2020%20-%20MDH%20Notice%20-%20Out%20of%20State%20Travel%20Advisory.pdf).

At this time, the CDC warns that travel increases your chance of getting and spreading COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

The CDC warns: You can get COVID-19 during your travels. You may feel well and not have any symptoms, but you can still spread COVID-19 to others. You and your travel companions (including children) may spread COVID-19 to other people including your family, friends, and community for 14 days after you were exposed to the virus.

Don’t travel if you are sick or if you have been around someone with COVID-19 in the past 14 days. Don’t travel with someone who is sick.

If you must travel:

- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Wear a mask or face covering in public.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- It is especially important to clean hands after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- Avoid traveling if you are sick.
People who are at increased risk for serious illness are also advised to avoid non-essential air travel.

CDC recommends travelers defer all cruise ship travel worldwide.

Visit the CDC travel advisory site to check on current travel warnings if you are planning a trip abroad: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html.

What can I do to be prepared for COVID-19?
Older adults are advised to prepare in the following ways:

- Check your regular prescription drugs to make sure you have an adequate supply; refill your prescriptions if needed
- Have an adequate supply of non-prescriptive drugs and other health supplies, including pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines
- Have enough household items, groceries, and water on hand so that you will be prepared to stay at home
- Consider ways of getting food brought to your house through family, social or commercial networks if you are forced to stay home for longer than your supplies allow
- Stay in touch with others by phone or email; you may need to ask for help from friends, family, neighbors, community health workers, etc. if you become sick
- Determine who can provide you with care if your caregiver gets sick
- Practice social distancing — keep distance between yourself and others

Wash your hands after putting away groceries, touching money or handling anything that comes from outside the home. Clean your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, or having been in a public place. Ask anyone entering your home to wash their hands upon entering.

Use commercial cleaning products to wipe high-touch points often, including:

- Canes, walker grips, wheelchair arms, push handles and brake handles
- Handrails and commode chair handrails, faucets, doorknobs, and refrigerator handles
- Reacher/grabber handles and pill boxes
- Telephones, remotes and light switches

What is social distancing?
The best way to slow the spread of COVID-19 is through “social distancing,” which means staying at least six feet away from others. Social distancing can take many forms, depending on your lifestyle and your family or living situation. Social distancing can include the following habits and steps:

- Avoid handshaking, hugging and other intimate types of greeting
- Stay at least six feet away from others whenever possible, and wear a mask
- Avoid non-essential travel (your health care provider may have specific guidance for your situation)
• Avoid crowds, especially in poorly ventilated spaces
• Avoid unnecessary errands — consider ways to have essential items, like food and other household supplies, brought to you through delivery services or through family or social networks

For older adults, social distancing is especially important because they are a high risk group. It is recommended that those at a high risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 stay home as much as possible.

While social distancing and self-quarantine are needed to limit and control the spread of the disease, social connectedness is important. Virtual resources can and should be used during this time. Talk to your friends and family on the phone or over video to stay connected.

**What should I do if I think I am sick with COVID-19?**
If you exhibit any of the symptoms of COVID-19, call your health care provider and ask about next steps. If you don’t have a health care provider, contact your local health department.

**What can I do to support older adults?**
• Know what medications your older loved one is taking and contact them to ask if they need refills or an extended supply of medication
• Check in with any older friends or family members regularly by email or phone to see if they need assistance, food, water or other supplies. Always wash your hands and keep a safe distance when visiting.
• If a loved one is living in a care facility, monitor the situation — ask the facility about its protocol if there is an outbreak and about the health of other residents