



# How To Keep Yourself and Your Community Safe from COVID-19 in 2022

**A guide to doing the things you want to do while protecting yourself, your family, and your community from COVID-19.**

The COVID-19 pandemic is changing all the time. [Local risk levels](#) are changing constantly too. The pandemic has killed nearly 1,000,000 people in the U.S. and overwhelmed our hospitals, but with the tools now available to us, we can safely do more of the things we love. Vaccines, boosters, tests, masks, treatment, and ventilation (fresh air) are all helpful tools to keep our communities safe.

These tools are important for everyone. They are especially important if your family or community is at higher risk. People at higher risk include people who are older, pregnant, too young to be vaccinated, or have higher risk medical conditions. Communities at higher risk include those with lower vaccination rates, more service workers, and fewer doctors, pharmacies, and hospitals.

## Checklist

Here's a quick, easy checklist that you can use to make sure that you are prepared to keep yourself and your family safe, while returning to the things you love.

- Get **vaccinated**. Go to [www.vaccines.gov](http://www.vaccines.gov) to find free vaccines near you.
- Keep **masks** on hand for high-risk situations.
- Stock up on **tests** from [www.COVIDtests.gov](http://www.COVIDtests.gov), and test if you have symptoms.
- If you're feeling sick, exposed to COVID-19, or **test positive**, stay home and wear a mask around other people.
- Check your county's **risk levels** regularly, and follow CDC guidance, at [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html).

## Vaccines

### **Get vaccinated and up to date with vaccines and boosters.**

COVID-19 is expected to have new surges and variants in the future. The best way to be prepared and protected is to get the COVID-19 vaccine and to be up to date on any recommended booster shots. The shots work really well against COVID-19. The shots have saved millions of people from having to go to the hospital or die of COVID-19. Getting the shot protects you and people around you who are at higher risk, including kids too young to be vaccinated. Vaccines are free for everyone in the U.S. even if you have no insurance or documents. Find your shot: [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

### **Help other people get their shot.**

If you know people who haven't gotten their vaccine yet, you can help. Talking with friends and family is one of the most important ways people decide to get the shot. Build trust by listening and understanding what's holding them back. Show empathy for their concerns. Ask if you can share information. And help them find their own reason to get vaccinated. It can take a lot of tries, but it works. People are deciding every day to get their first shot. More: [Guidelines for having vaccine conversations](#).

## Masks

### **Wear a good mask to protect yourself and others.**

A mask protects you and the people around you. Even if there is no local requirement to wear a mask, you should wear a mask whenever you are worried you might get infected or infect others. Risk is higher when:

- You have symptoms or have been around someone who has COVID-19.
- You are around someone who has COVID-19 or was recently exposed.
- The virus is spreading quickly in your community.
- You are in crowded indoor places like a grocery store, bar, or concert.
- You are around people who are at higher risk.

Wear a mask that is comfortable and fits well over your nose and mouth. A cloth mask cuts your risk of COVID-19 in half. A surgical mask works even better. The best is a respirator mask (called a N95, KN95, or KF94). Pick up 3 free N95 masks for each adult at a [participating pharmacy](#) or [health center](#), so you have them when you need them. You generally do not need to wear a mask outside unless it is very crowded.

## Tests

### **Get tested to keep yourself and others safe.**

COVID-19 tests tell you when you are infected. They can help you:

- 1) Stop the virus from spreading. Get tested if you have symptoms or have been exposed to COVID-19. If you know that you are infected, you can wear a mask, avoid other people, and tell close contacts so they can get tested and quarantine. A test is also helpful if you want to spend time with someone who is at high risk.
- 2) Get treated if you are at high risk. (See “Treatments” below.)

You should get tested if you have been exposed to COVID-19 (see below) or have symptoms. You can also test before getting together when the virus is spreading in your community. You may also need to be tested for school, work, or travel to other countries.

The new rapid antigen tests (also known as at-home tests) can be done easily at home. You can get the result in a few minutes. Make sure you have some tests at home, so you don't have to rush to get a test when you need it.

You can get free tests in a few ways. 1) Order 4 free tests for each household at [COVIDtests.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/covid/testing/). 2) Most health insurances are required to pay for 8 rapid tests per

month when you buy them at a store. 3) Many community health centers are giving away free tests. Learn more about at-home tests at [COVIDtests.gov](https://www.covidtests.gov).

Many pharmacies and health departments are also doing PCR tests for free. A PCR test is done by a medical professional and can take a few days to get a result. It is even more accurate than a rapid test, but it should not be used if you had COVID-19 within the last 90 days. Most of the time, a rapid test is good enough.

## What to do if you are exposed to COVID-19

If you have been close to someone who has COVID-19, what you do depends on whether you're up to date on vaccines. Everyone who is exposed should get tested on day 5 and wear a mask around other people for 10 days. If you are not vaccinated or are not up to date on boosters, you should also stay home for the first 5 days. (Note that these are the [CDC recommendations](#) as of March, 2022. This may change as the pandemic changes. Local guidelines may be a bit different too.)

## What to do if you test positive for COVID-19

If you test positive for COVID-19, **stay home for at least 5 days and wear a mask around other people for 10 days even if you don't feel sick**. After the 5 days, if you are feeling better and have no fever, you can test yourself using a rapid antigen test. If the test is negative, you can leave home but must wear a mask for a total of 10 days. If the test is positive, stay home for 5 more days (total of 10 days).

Most cases of COVID-19 can be managed at home. Get lots of rest and drink fluids. You can take over-the-counter medicine for symptoms like fever, cough, muscle aches, or sore throat. Ask family, neighbors, or a local community organization for help with groceries and meals.

If you are having a lot of trouble breathing or are feeling very sick, contact a medical professional or go to the ER. If you are at [higher risk](#) of getting very sick from

COVID-19, talk to a health professional as soon as you test positive so you can get treated early (see below).

### **Get treated early if you are at high risk.**

Some people are at [higher risk](#) of getting very sick from COVID-19. We now have very good, free treatments that prevent people who are at high risk from being hospitalized or dying of COVID-19. You do need to start the treatments within 5 days of starting to feel sick. If you are at high risk, get tested as soon as you think you might have COVID-19, and talk to a doctor or health professional about getting treated. In some cases, you may be able to get tested and get a prescription on the same visit to a pharmacy or other healthcare setting.

## **Community**

### **Strengthen connections with your community.**

Having a community to depend on can make all the difference. Research [shows](#) that there are tremendous mental and physical health benefits to maintaining strong social ties. Prioritize relationships with friends and family, and get used to asking for and giving help to other people, so it's easier to ask when you really need it. If you are able to, volunteer with local [community-based organizations](#) like your church, food bank, or other service groups to help strengthen your entire community.

## **More Tools**

- **Ventilation (Fresh Air):** Increase fresh air to reduce your risk of catching viruses like COVID-19, the flu, and the common cold. Open a window or get together outdoors when you can. Getting a HEPA filter (an air cleaner) can be helpful if you can't get fresh air.
- **Precautions for Big Gatherings:** The more people get together in one place, the higher the risk that someone has COVID-19 and will spread it to other people. Vaccine requirements, masks, tests, and ventilation can all be helpful

ways to make large gatherings safer. If the virus is spreading a lot in your community, it's best to avoid large indoor gatherings.

- **Primary Care:** Having a regular doctor is one of the most important ways to protect your health generally. It is also helpful, so you have someone you can call if you get sick. If you do not have regular health care, one place to get low-cost health care is a nearby [community health center](#).
- **Health Insurance:** There are more options than ever before to get affordable health insurance. Many people qualify for reduced cost insurance. If you have low income, the insurance may even be free. Visit [HealthCare.gov](#) to find your health insurance options. If you do not qualify for government health insurance, you can get low-cost health at a nearby community health center. [Find a community health center](#).
- **Know where to find credible information:** There is a lot of misinformation and rumors out there about COVID-19, and it can be hard to figure out what's real. Check with expert, trustworthy sources. Some good sources include the CDC, your doctor, community health workers, or [community-based organizations](#) that have focused on COVID-19 prevention. If you see something on social media and are not sure whether it's true, don't share it. [More on fighting health misinformation](#).

### **Additional Resources**

- Made to Save: [Learn More](#), [Resource Library](#), and [Community Partners](#)