

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

Denver Fire Department

What are the symptoms of COVID-19 infection?

Symptoms of COVID-19 can range from the 'classic' presentation of fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath, to mild symptoms of the common cold such as runny nose, sinus congestion, sore throat, body aches, fatigue, and headache. GI symptoms (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea), as well as temporary loss of smell and/or taste have also been reported. Symptoms can appear anywhere from 2-14 days after exposure, most commonly around 5-6 days. If you develop symptoms at any time, it is important to self-isolate and get tested.

How is COVID-19 transmitted?

Like many respiratory viruses, COVID-19 is transmitted person to person via the respiratory droplets of an infected individual. Infected individuals can be symptomatic or asymptomatic, and exposure to an 'infectious dose' is necessary to contract infection. Some experts estimate that exposure to as few as 1000 COVID-19 viral particles is sufficient to become infected with COVID-19, and a single cough or sneeze can contain as many as 200,000,000 viral particles.

Examples of dose:

- Cough – a single cough releases about 3,000 droplets at about 50 miles/hour
- Sneeze – a single sneeze releases about 30,000 droplets at up to 200 miles/hour
- Breath – a single breath releases 50-5000 droplets, fewer through nose-breathing; typically contains low level of viral particles if the individual is infected, and is less likely to contain particles from the lower respiratory tract

Coughing and sneezing clearly release the largest amounts of viral particles, the droplet size of which can vary. Larger droplets will fall on surfaces or the ground, whereas smaller droplets can hang in the air for an unknown period of time. Social distancing of 6 feet or more will minimize your exposure to respiratory droplets. This highlights the importance of wearing a face mask, especially if you are symptomatic.

How can I protect myself?

By virtue of the fact that you are a First Responder, the likelihood of being exposed to COVID-19 is increased. However, the experience of the DFD thus far is such that relatively few members have contracted COVID-19; their illnesses were mild; and they did not appear to contract it in the context of running medical calls. In other words -- the required PPE and distancing strategies are working, and are important to maintain. COVID-19 is subject to the same infection control measures as other viruses, and the following habits will reduce exposure:

- Wash your hands often OR use hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol)
- Avoid touching your nose, eyes, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with people who are symptomatic

- Practice social distancing – stay 6 feet away from others whenever possible
- Keep your face covered, especially if you cough or sneeze
- Clean & disinfect frequently touched surfaces – examples: tables, handles, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, desks, phones, computers, bathroom surfaces

On a larger scale, the following suggestions can help you make decisions about your daily activities:

- According to public health experts, when positive test rates stay at 5% or lower for 2 weeks, this suggests that there is adequate testing in the state to get virus transmission under control, and the risk of contracting the virus in public is lower; the closer that number is to 2%, the better.
- Limit the number of your close contacts as you resume social activities/gatherings.
- Keep higher risk activities as short as possible – outdoor exposures carry the least risk, while face-to-face contact with others and indoor activities in enclosed spaces carry more risk.

Where can I get tested?

- Pepsi Center: <https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/covid-19/recovery-guidance/testing.html>
- Denver Health: <https://dhharedcap.ucdenver.edu/surveys/?s=37YRWCXX7M>
- Kaiser Permanente: members can call 303.338.4545, identify yourself as a First Responder

Is a COVID-19 infection more dangerous if you have an underlying medical condition?

Unfortunately, the risk of severe COVID-19 illness is higher in these individuals. In particular:

- People over the age of 60, especially those over the age of 80
- Heart or lung disease
- Kidney disease
- Immunocompromised individuals
- Older individuals WITH medical conditions are at highest risk

In the fire service, the risks of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and certain mental health conditions are already significantly elevated. While there is not much known at this point regarding which medical conditions are more dangerous than others, it is safe to assume that addressing any underlying health issues you may have will decrease your risk of severe illness, should you contract COVID-19.

Resources for reliable information:

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment:

<https://covid19.colorado.gov/>

Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center:

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>