

# How to Care for Yourself with Symptoms Consistent with COVID-19

updated March 28, 2020, 5:00 PM

---

The following information should not take the place of medical advice from a healthcare provider.

If you are in King County and have COVID-19 symptoms, questions about COVID-19 or if you're a healthcare provider with questions about COVID-19, contact our novel coronavirus call center at 206-477-3977.

## Common COVID-19 Symptoms

- **Cough**
  - There are many reasons someone might have a cough including COPD, pneumonia, influenza, or the common cold.
  - If you usually have a cough from health problems or smoking, pay attention to whether your cough has changed in some way. Is it different or worse?
- **Fever**
  - Fever is a sign that the body is fighting an infection. It will go away as you are getting better.
  - If you have a thermometer, take your temperature once a day if you are feeling generally well or have mild symptoms.
  - When you have a fever you can become dehydrated from sweating or not drinking enough liquids if you don't feel well.
    - If you think you are becoming dehydrated or have a high fever, seek medical care.
  - Try to drink lots of liquids (water, broth, herbal tea, diluted sports drinks or Pedialyte)
  - Try to drink small amounts of fluids frequently to prevent dehydration, even if you do not feel thirsty.
  - If you are not able to eat solid foods, try to drink fluids that contain sugars and salts, such as broth or soups, sports drinks, like Gatorade (diluted half and half with water), Pedialyte or Lytren (undiluted), ginger ale and other sodas, but not diet drinks.
  - Dehydration signs to watch for:
    - Decreased saliva/dry mouth and tongue
    - Skin tenting: check this by picking up layers of skin between your thumb and forefinger and gently pinching for 1 second. Normally, the skin will flatten out into its usual shape right away. When you are dehydrated

your skin will “tent” or take 2 or more seconds to flatten out. This is best checked on the belly skin of a child and on the upper chest of an adult.

- If you are dehydrated, you will urinate (pee) less and less will come out. It can become dark in color from concentration.
  - Weakness or unresponsiveness
  - If you are feeling weak or confused, call 911 as soon as possible
- **Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath- Call 911**
    - If you have any severe COVID-19 like symptoms, Call 911.
  - **Sore throat**
  - **Generalized muscle aches**

### Severe Symptoms Include:

- Difficulty breathing, short of breath, fast breathing, or skin paler than normal (bluish in lighter skinned people and gray or whitish in darker skinned people)
- Coughing up blood
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Confusion or does not respond or communicate appropriately
- Has convulsions (seizures)
- High fever
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Sudden dizziness
- Shows signs of dehydration and cannot take enough fluids
- Is getting worse again after appearing to improve
- Is an infant younger than 2 months old with fever, poor feeding, urinating less than 3 times per day or other signs of illness

### Monitoring and Preventing the Spread to Others

- Try to rest as much as you can. Rest helps you heal. Try to stay about 6 feet away from others. Wear a mask if you need to be close to people (within 6 feet). This will help prevent them from getting sick.
- Wash your hands often; before and after using the bathroom, before preparing food for yourself or eating, after you sneeze or cough, do wound care, touch pets or handle garbage.

- Remember to cover your coughs and sneezes. You can use a tissue or the crook of your elbow. If available, wear a mask if when around other people - if not, cover nose and mouth with alternative covering
- Try to have tissues and a trash bag near you. Throw used tissues and masks away in the trash bag.
- Watch for symptoms getting worse.
  - People with COVID-19 can experience a mild illness but then become very sick quickly. It is extremely important that you can call or visit a doctor, or call 911 if you start to get worse suddenly. Try not to stay alone. Have someone check in on you several times a day if possible.
  - Complications are more common in people who have health problems like diabetes, heart and lung problems, people with weakened immune systems or women who are pregnant. Make sure to check with a doctor if you have any of these issues. It is important to see a provider early if your symptoms get worse as the illness can progress from mild to severe quickly.

## If You Use Substances

Sharing bottles, cigarettes/ joints/ blunts, needles, etc increases your risk of getting or spreading COVID19.

- Try not to share any personal items.

Smoking substances like tobacco, marijuana, meth or cocaine can also make respiratory symptoms (breathing) worse.

- Increase symptom monitoring.
- Try to decrease amount you smoke or stop all together.
- Talk to a doctor about nicotine replacements if you want help to decrease or stop.

## Alcohol Use

- Drinking small quantities of alcohol-based hand sanitizer, mouth wash, and other isopropyl alcohol products when supplies of liquor, beer, and wine are low can result in liver damage, liver failure, and death in larger quantities.
- If you drink liquor daily and switch to beer or wine you this can put you at risk to develop withdrawal, as beer and wine have a much lower alcohol content.
- Switching from liquor to beer or wine may cause dangerous withdrawal symptoms or low sodium in the blood (which can be dangerous) due to drinking a higher volume of liquid.
- Drinking alcohol can make you more dehydrated
  - Watch for signs of dehydration
- Remember that stopping drinking suddenly is not safe. If you have to suddenly stop drinking after drinking heavy amounts of alcohol, get medical attention.