



## **COVID-19 INFECTION CONTROL: FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS FACTSHEET**

### **WHAT IS COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person, especially among people who are in close contact with one another, which means about 6 feet. Family members, caregivers, and other individuals may have close contact with a person who is positive for COVID-19. Those who are in close contact should monitor their health and report to a healthcare provider immediately if symptoms develop that suggest possible COVID-19 infection. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough and shortness of breath.

Reference: CDC. (28, March 2020). Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

### **INFECTION CONTROL TIPS FOR CARING FOR A PERSON WITH COVID-19**

- **LIMIT EXPOSURE TO PERSON WITH COVID-19**

Limit people coming into the home to those who provide care. Restrict visitors who do not need to be in the home. When possible, have other household members stay at another home or place of residence. If this is not possible, strongly encourage the person with COVID-19 to stay in a different area or room away from others and to use a separate bathroom. If a separate bathroom is not available, disinfect the common bathroom after every use.

- **SHOULD I WEAR A MASK OR GLOVES?**

The person who is ill should wear a face mask when near other people. If the person is unable to wear a face mask, caregivers and others should wear a mask when in the same room as the person who is ill. Wear a disposable mask and gloves when touching the person or in contact with his or her body fluids. Dispose of masks and gloves after use. Do not reuse.

- **HANDWASHING**

Frequently wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

Reference: CDC. (2020, March 6). Recommended precautions for household members, intimate partners, and caregivers in a nonhealthcare setting of a patient with symptomatic laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 or a patient under investigation. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>

- **KEEP ENVIRONMENT CLEAN**

Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as a tables, countertops, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks, phones, touch screens, remote controls, keyboards, and electronics, with household cleaners and disinfectants.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for safe and effective use. Avoid sharing household items.



- **CLEANING AND DISINFECTING**

Cleaning is the removal of germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces. It does not kill the germs, but by removing them, it lowers the number of germs and the risk of spreading infection. Disinfecting involves using chemicals, such as EPA-registered disinfectants, to kill germs on surfaces. This does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove the germs. Disinfecting after cleaning kills the germs that remain on the surface to lower the risk of infection.

- **LAUNDRY CARE**

Remove and wash clothes, towels, or bed linens that have bodily fluid on them. Wear disposable gloves when handling soiled items and keep the items away from your body. If possible, do not shake the laundry, as shaking can disperse germs into the air. Use disposable gloves to place soiled items in a large plastic bag, carry the bag to the laundry area, and put items in the washing machine. Wash items using the warmest temperature recommended on the laundry care labels. Remove gloves and wash hands immediately. After laundry is washed, dry items on the warmest temperature according to the laundry care labels.

- **CARE OF DISHES AND UTENSILS**

Do not share dishes, utensils, cups, and glasses, especially with a person who is ill. Wash such items thoroughly after used or touched.

- **HANDLING TRASH**

CDC guidelines state that handling and management of trash should be completed in accordance with routine procedures, including:

- Wearing gloves
- Placing trash in designated containers
- Removing soiled gloves
- Placing gloves in designated trash bin
- Washing hands

Reference: CDC. (2020, March 28). Interim Recommendations for U.S. Households with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Retrieved from

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cleaning-disinfection.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fcleaning-disinfection.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cleaning-disinfection.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fcleaning-disinfection.html)

## **MANAGING SYMPTOMS OF THE PERSON WITH COVID-19**

Keep the person at home and as comfortable as possible. Ensure that you understand and are able to assist the person with COVID-19 to understand and follow instructions from healthcare provider related to medication and care. Help the patient with basic needs in the home and provide ongoing support for getting groceries, medications, and various personal items. Monitor the person's symptoms, and call a healthcare provider if symptoms worsen. If a medical emergency occurs, call 9-1-1 and notify the dispatcher that the person has COVID-19.



- **HOW LONG DOES A PERSON WITH COVID-19 HAVE TO REMAIN ISOLATED?**

People with COVID-19 who have stayed home can stop home isolation under the following conditions:

- No fever for 72 hours  
AND
- Other symptoms have improved  
AND
- 7 days since the first symptoms have appeared
- In all cases, follow the guidance of your healthcare provider and local health department.

Reference: CDC. (2020, March 21). Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>

- **MONITOR FOOD, MEDICATION AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES**

Stock up on non-perishable food to have in your home to minimize trips to the grocery store. Ensure adequate amounts of medication and medical supplies, such as oxygen, incontinence supplies, and wound care items, are available.

- How do I go grocery shopping?
  - One option is grocery delivery services.
    - Avoid direct hand-off of groceries and money by arranging to have the items delivered to your doorstep.
    - Tip electronically through an online ordering system; do not hand off cash.
    - Order earlier than normal to prevent running out of needed items.
  - If you are buying groceries in a store,
    - Go shopping at a time that is less busy.
    - Take germicide wipes to wipe the cart handle before you shop.
    - Pay by credit or debit card to prevent handing bills and coins.
    - Once you bring the groceries home,
      - Wash your hands.
      - Disinfect counters or any other surfaces you have touched.
      - Wash produce.

References:

CDC. (2020, March 30). Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Steps to Prevent Getting Sick. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/get-ready.html>



Stanger, Tobie. (2020, March 26). How to Protect Yourself From Coronavirus When Grocery Shopping. Retrieved from <https://www.consumerreports.org/food-shopping/how-to-protect-yourself-from-coronavirus-when-grocery-shopping/>

#### **CAN A PERSON WITH COVID-19 CARE FOR PETS?**

Do not handle pets or any other animals when you are sick. When possible have another member of your household care for your animal when you are sick. COVID-19 is a new virus and animal transmission is not known.

Reference: CDC. (2020, March 21). Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>

# Talking about COVID-19 with People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)

Erin Sass, Clinical Educator

With so much information out there about coronavirus (COVID-19), it can be overwhelming and difficult to understand the pandemic and how to stay safe. It can be particularly difficult for caregivers to explain to people with I/DD what is happening and why. Nevertheless, explaining the COVID-19 situation to people with I/DD increases their understanding and decreases their confusion, both of which are important to maintaining their mental health.

Here are some tips to help family members and caregivers of people with I/DD to concretely share information about the virus and what everyone can do to stay healthy and safe.

- **Consider each person's feelings.** A pandemic is a traumatic event, and what might seem like an 'over-reaction' to some is a difficult reality for others. People react and cope in their own ways. Trainings on trauma-related topics are available at <https://paautism.org/elearning/>.
- **Talk about it.** Be available for questions, and take time answering them. For individuals with communication barriers, consider using communication boards to help them express their feelings about the current situation. For more information:  
<https://www.talktometechnologies.com/pages/covid-19>  
[https://www.talktometechnologies.com/pages/communication-boards-free-download?mc\\_cid=1add4bb68f&mc\\_eid=28f5729de0](https://www.talktometechnologies.com/pages/communication-boards-free-download?mc_cid=1add4bb68f&mc_eid=28f5729de0) ;  
<https://www.talktometechnologies.com/>.
- **Be okay with not having all the answers about COVID-19.** Let people know their questions matter. If you do not have answers, offer to find the answers and get back to them as soon as possible; or, offer to work with them to find the answers. Gather the information from trusted organizations, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, hospitals, universities, etc.
- **Be aware of body language and facial expressions when talking.** Your words communicate a message; if your body language communicates a different message, it can cause confusion, distrust, and fear.
- **Share experiences.** Knowing that others are dealing with similar feelings can ease a one's worry and fears. For details on how to help someone manage anxiety and/or depression, visit <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2020/03/how-to-help-someone-with-anxiety-or-depression-during-covid-19/>
- **Keep communication concrete.** A resource written by self-advocates can be found at <https://selfadvocacyinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Plain-Language-Information-on-Coronavirus.pdf>. Here are some other examples for ways to talk about the virus:
  - **Explain what COVID-19 is physically, what it means.**  
COVID-19 is a virus that is new to people. It is very contagious – people can get it if they breathe it in, or if they touch their faces when the virus is on their hands.
  - **Explain how you might feel if you get it.**

A list of the symptoms of COVID-19 is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

- People who have had it say that they had a fever, a dry cough, and sometimes had a harder time with their breathing. Some people say the symptoms are similar to the flu.
- Many people who get the virus have mild symptoms. Mild means not strong, like mild salsa is not spicy.
- Some people who get the virus experience strong, or severe, symptoms. This happens mostly to people who elderly and people have other health problems.
- **Explain what is happening right now, or what they might see.**
  - COVID-19 has made people sick all over the world.
  - Many people are wearing masks and gloves. They are trying not to spread the virus to other people (if they have it), or trying not to get it themselves from others.
  - Some people might act as if they do not know about the COVID-19 pandemic or as if it is no a big deal to them. It is always best to be safe and follow what the experts tell us to do.
- **Explain what to do to stay healthy and to help others stay healthy.**
  - Wash your hands often, for at least 20 seconds each time. Sing the “ABC” song or the “Happy Birthday” song to make sure you are washing long enough. Get a handwashing poster here: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/wash-your-hands-poster-english-508.pdf>
  - Cough and sneeze into your elbow, not your hand. Get a poster about covering your cough here: [https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/protect/cdc\\_cough.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/protect/cdc_cough.pdf)
  - Try to keep your hands away from your nose, mouth, and eyes. These are places where the virus can get into your body.
  - Use social distancing to stop the virus from spreading to you and others. Social distancing means to stay away from busy places and to stand at least 6 feet away from other people.
  - For more information, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>.
- **Explain what to do if you feel sick.**
  - Tell someone (a family member or caregiver) if you feel sick so they can get what you need to feel better.

## Communicating about COVID-19 through Social Stories®

Social Stories® are useful tools for communicating concretely with people who have autism. They can be helpful now, during the confusion and uncertainty of the COVID-19 crisis. Links to social stories® developed by ASERT (Autism Services, Education, Resources and Training) are provided below.

- What is Coronavirus? <https://paautism.org/resource/coronavirus-social-story/>
- Handwashing - <https://paautism.org/resource/hand-washing-social-story/>
- Social Distancing - <https://paautism.org/resource/social-distancing-social-story/>
- Isolation - <https://paautism.org/resource/isolation-social-story/>

### Resources

Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus. (2020, February 28). Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Health and Safety Guide. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://paaautism.org/resource/coronavirus-resources/>



# Reducing the Spread of Infection

*Rehearsal Guide...  
preparing people with  
intellectual and developmental  
disabilities (I/DD) to reduce the  
spread of infection.*



## INTRODUCTION FOR CAREGIVERS

A rehearsal guide contains realistic pictures, concrete ideas, and clear, brief instructions for guiding a person through what can be expected in a specific situation. It includes helpful suggestions for caregivers to follow to make the experience meaningful for the person and increase the likelihood of a successful outcome. This approach is beneficial when supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) who are anxious about situations such as doctors' appointments, hospitalizations, and medical testing.

A rehearsal guide provides opportunities for the caregiver to assist the person to learn about a specific situation. It contains information on what is needed and why and explains exactly what can be expected. Such a guide is most effective when it is person-centered and used in conjunction with discussion to allow exploration of specific areas of concern. It can be a powerful tool when used as intended.

The expected result is that the person will then experience the situation in a way that supports health and well-being by being prepared and knowing what to expect. The guide can be used at all stages of the situation to facilitate a positive end result.

Thank you for taking the time to use this tool to work with self advocates to improve their health outcomes.

## HOW TO USE THIS REHEARSAL GUIDE

For best results, begin to review this rehearsal guide with the person prior to the day of the appointment. Sometimes it will help to review this material with an individual several days or weeks before an appointment; other times, it may be better to wait to review this material until just before the procedure is to take place, perhaps the day before or the morning of the procedure. It is up to the caregiver to determine which will best suit the individual's needs and abilities in understanding the information provided; however, it is important not to wait until 5 minutes before a procedure to introduce this guide to an individual. Give the individual enough time in advance to become familiar with the procedure based on the pictures and information contained on each page and on the individual's abilities.

It is best to review this guide slowly and to focus on one idea/page at a time, allowing the person to talk and/or ask questions after each idea/page is presented. A caregiver may want to share experiences in regards to having this procedure done personally, but be sure to do so in a positive manner, depicting a positive outcome.

### For best practices:

- Allot time to review this material when the individual is alert and interested in doing so.
- Ensure that the setting is free from distraction. Based on the individual's attention span, it may be best to review one page at a time, rather than reviewing an entire guide in one sitting.
- Explain each picture and practice the suggested exercises with the individual, such as deep breathing, as they appear throughout the guide.
- On the day of the procedure, take this guide along to continue rehearsing the various steps involved in the procedure. Review each page step by step.
- Remain positive, calm, and upbeat.
- Remember to offer positive reinforcement and praise throughout the procedure, especially after the individual has successfully completed the procedure.

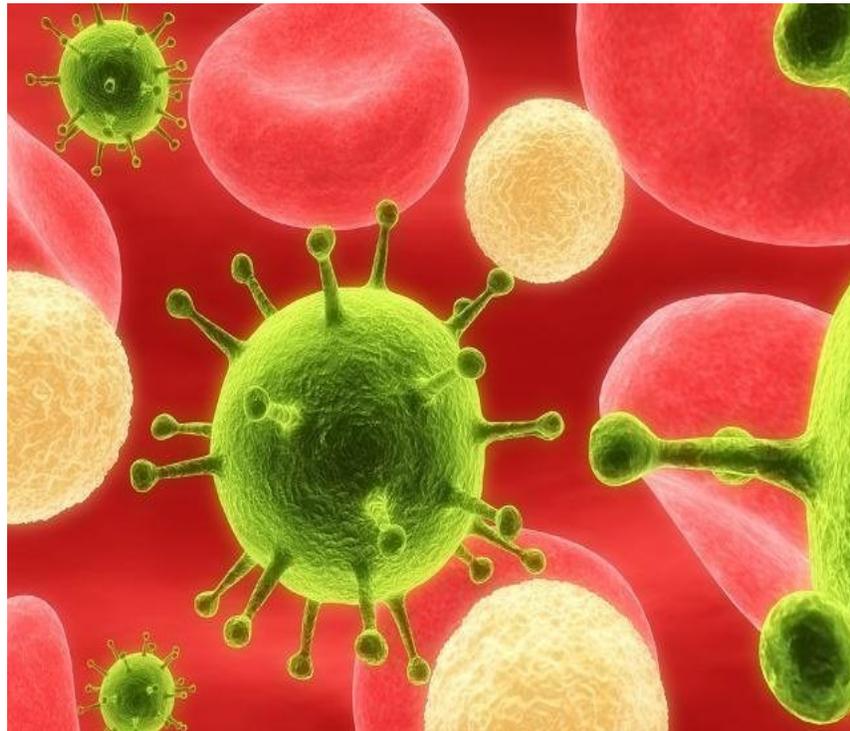
## How Infections Spread

(Name of individual), you are going to learn about how infections spread.

Germs are a part of everyday life and are found everywhere.

*Some germs are helpful, and other germs are harmful.*

A small number of germs cause infections.

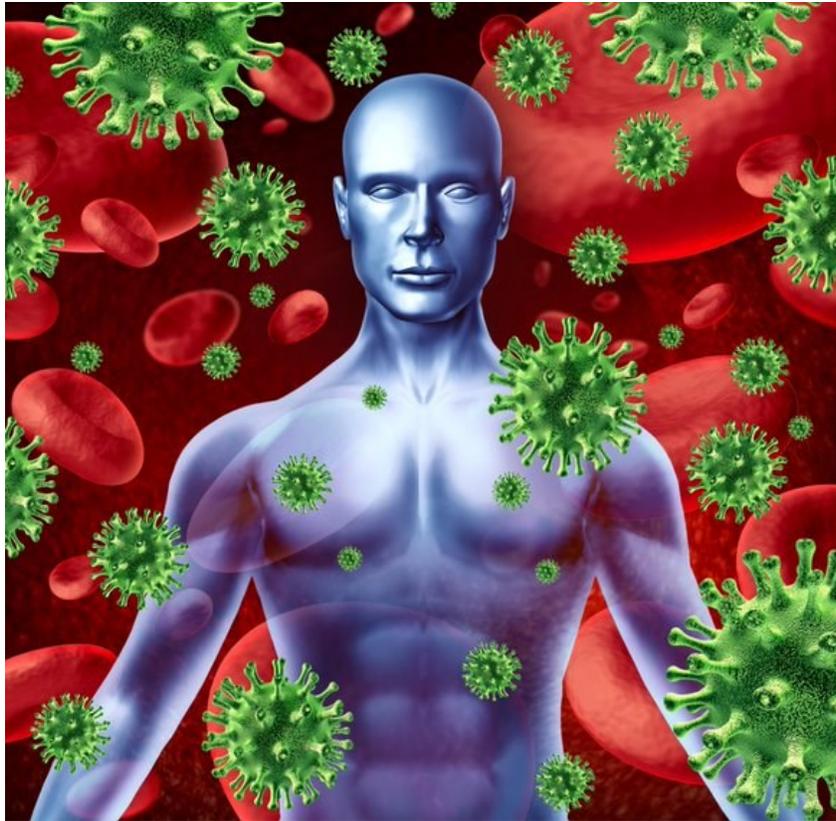


## How Do Infections Happen?

Infections happen when germs enter your body, grow, and cause problems in your body.

For an infection to happen, there must be a place where germs start and a way for germs to get inside a body to live and grow.

For an infection to spread, germs need a way to move out of one person's body and into another person's body.



## How do Germs Spread?

Germs need people and things to move.

Germs can move when the person they live in touches another person or touches a thing.

Germs also can move in the wet spray that happens when a person coughs or sneezes.



## Coughing and Sneezing

A cough or sneeze can send germs 3 to 6 feet from you.

### When you cough or sneeze:

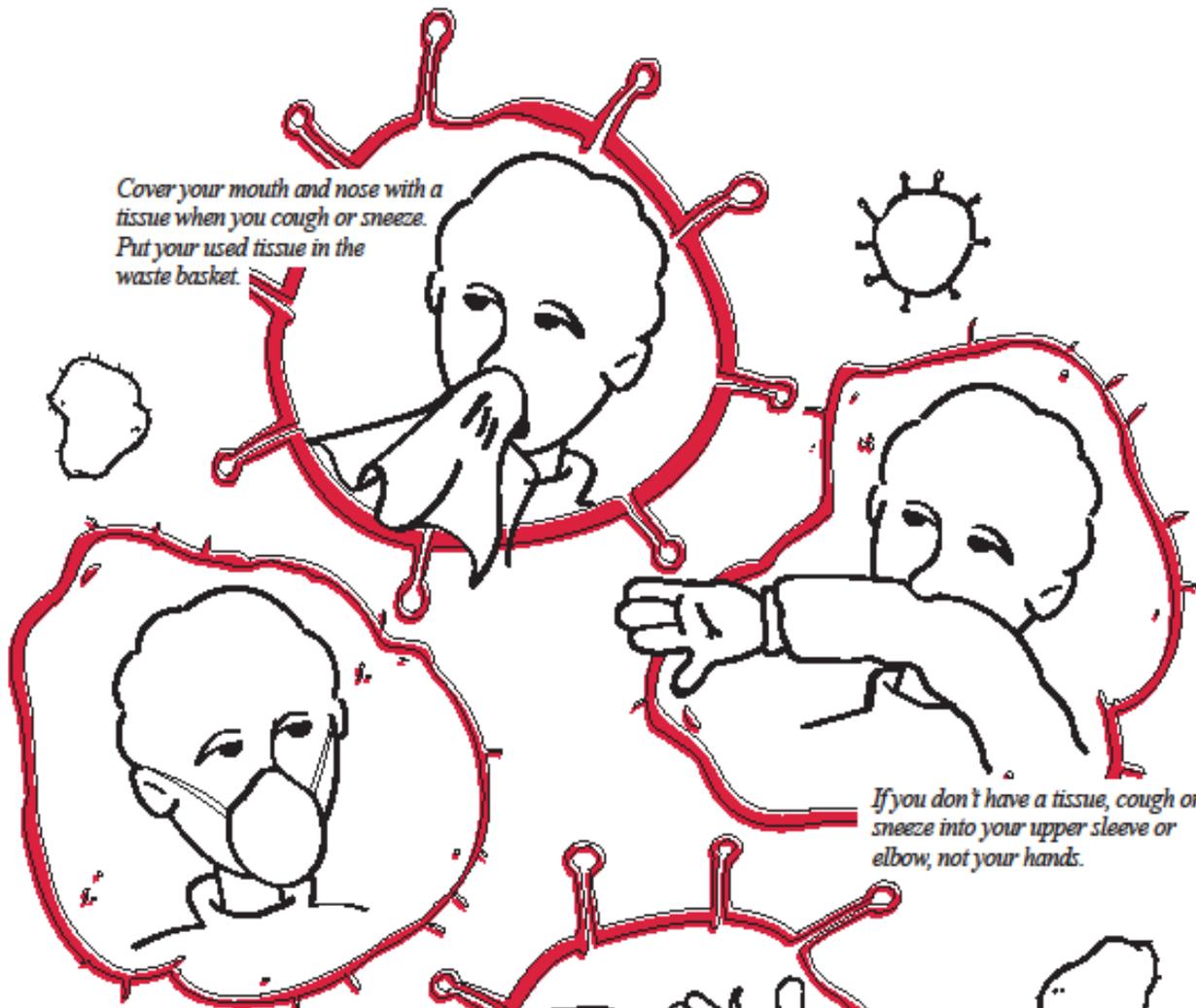
- Turn your face away from people.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, and put the tissue in the trash can right away.
- Use your elbow if you do not have a tissue.
  - Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.



# Cover Cough

— Stop the spread of germs that can make you and others sick! —

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Put your used tissue in the waste basket.



If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, not your hands.

You may be asked to put on a facemask to protect others.



Wash hands often with soap and warm water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

## Wash Hands

Another way to keep yourself and the people you live with from getting sick is to wash your hands—a lot!



### When to wash your hands:

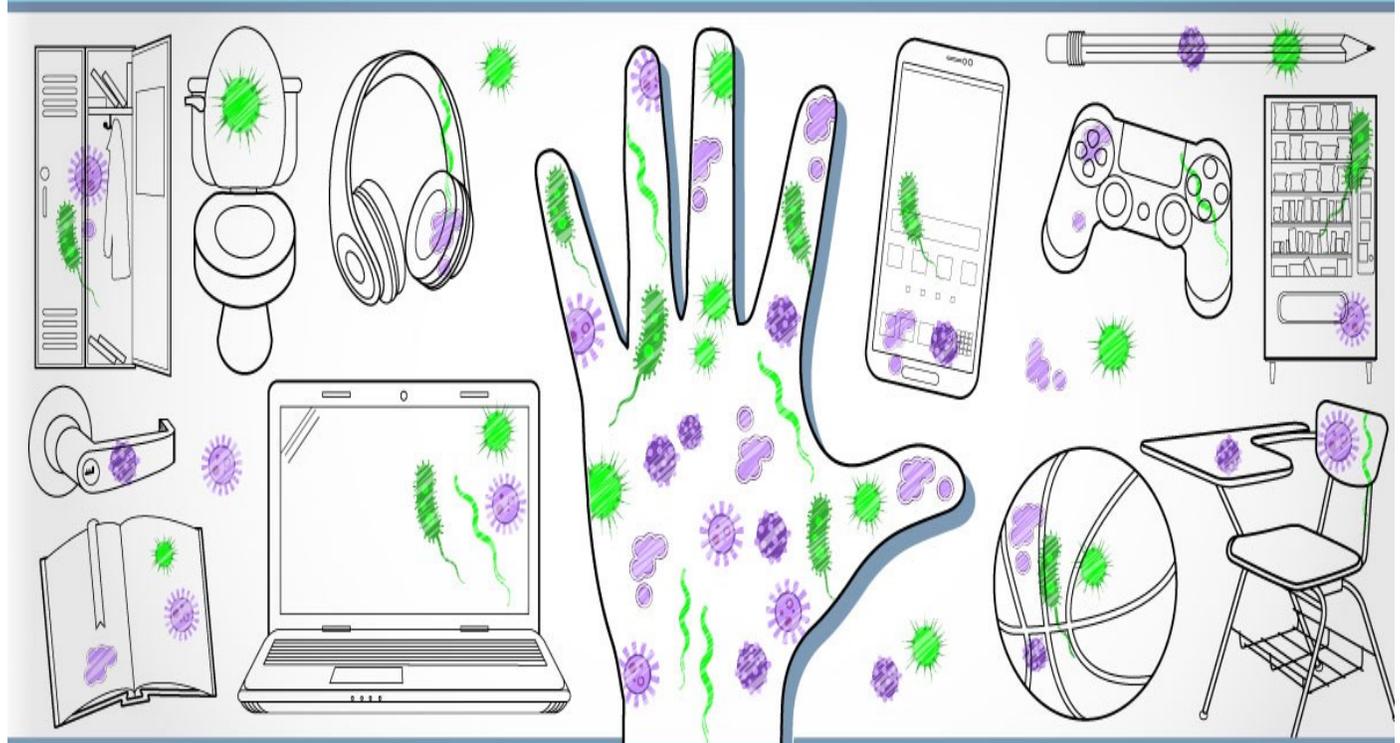
- After you cough, sneeze, or blow your nose
- After you use the toilet
- After you come home from a public place
- Before, during, and after you prepare food
- Before you eat
- Before and after you treat a cut or sore
- After you change a diaper or help clean up after a child uses the toilet
- After touching garbage

## Five Steps for Washing Hands

1. Wet hands with water.
2. Put soap on hands.
3. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds.
4. Rinse hands well.
5. Dry hands using a clean towel or let air dry them.



# GERMS are all around you.



Stay healthy. Wash your hands.

[www.cdc.gov/handwashing](http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing)

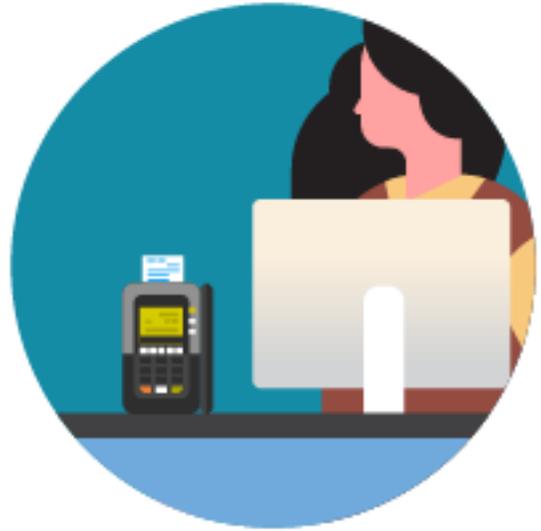


Now that you know what germs are and how they spread from person to person and place to place, you will learn how to clean your spaces and things.

## Clean Things You Touch a Lot

### Remember to clean:

- Cell phones
- Computers—keyboard and mouse
- Sinks
- House phones
- Doorknobs
- Light switches
- Tables
- Desks
- Pens and pencils
- Toilets
- Tablets (iPads)
- Hard-backed chairs
- Remote controls
- Handles (on cupboard, drawers, refrigerator, microwave)



## How to Wash Off Germs

Cleaning with soap and water to wash dirt and germs from surfaces removes germs but does not kill them.

Cleaning helps lower the number of germs and the risk of getting sick from them.



## How to Kill Germs

Cleaning products called ***disinfectants*** kill germs. Wiping items with disinfectant and water kills the germs on their surfaces.

Some products that are used to clean or disinfect can be dangerous if you touch or smell them for too long.

***Always ask before using cleaning products.***

### When using disinfectants, you should:

- Follow the instructions of a caregiver or label.
- Wear gloves.
- Make sure air moves easily in and out of the room.
- Not mix cleaning or disinfectant products.



**YOU'RE DOING GREAT SO FAR!**

**See? It's that simple!**

**I know you can do it! You always do a great job!**



## References

- Buttons & Badges. (2020, March 11). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/buttons.html>
- CDC. (2016, January 7). *How Infections Spread*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/spread/index.html>
- Cleaning And Disinfecting Your Home. (2020, March 28). Retrieved from [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-your-home.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-your-home.html)
- Cleveland Clinic. (2020, March 6). *Cough Etiquette: Why It's So Important*. Retrieved from <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/cough-etiquette-why-its-so-important/>
- Preventing 2019-nCoV from Spreading to Others. (2020, March 6). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>
- When and How to Wash Your Hands. (2019, October 3). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>



For additional information regarding this guide or  
any of our physical or behavioral health trainings,

contact

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# Coronavirus (COVID-19) Test

*Rehearsal Guide...*

*Preparing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to successfully complete a Coronavirus test.*

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A rehearsal guide provides opportunities for the caregiver to assist the person in learning about a specific situation. It contains information on what is needed and why and explains exactly what can be expected. Such a guide is most effective when it is person-centered and used in conjunction with discussion to allow exploration of specific areas of concern. It can be a powerful tool when used as intended. The expected result is that the person will then experience the situation in a way that supports health and well-being by being prepared and knowing what to expect. The guide can be used at all stages of the situation to facilitate a positive end result.

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- Explain each picture and practice the suggested exercises with the individual, such as deep breathing, as they appear throughout the guide.
- Remain positive, calm, and upbeat.
- Remember to offer positive reinforcement and praise throughout the procedure, especially after the individual has successfully completed the procedure.
- **On the day of the procedure, take this guide along to continue rehearsing the various steps involved in the procedure. Review each page step by step.**

## INTRODUCING THE PROCESS

*(Name of individual)*, you are going to visit a doctor or medical professional to be tested for the Coronavirus (COVID-19) on *(insert date here)*.

*(Name of caregiver)* will go with you and stay with you while you have the test done.

The test will take place at *(name of location)*.

Some tests are done in a building; some are done in a tent; and some are done while you sit in the vehicle.



**Note to Caregiver:** *If possible, prepare the individual for the setting in which he or she will experience the test—office, tent, or vehicle.*

## IF YOU ARE NERVOUS

Remember, (Name of caregiver) will be with you the whole time.

Deep breaths can help you relax, so lets practice deep breathing.



**Note to Caregiver:** Practice deep breathing with the individual. Encourage the individual to take slow, deep breaths with you now and as needed before the test.

## WHAT THE DOCTOR OR NURSE WILL WEAR

The doctor and others will be wearing a special uniform. They might look scary, but these uniforms help stop the spread of the virus.

*(Name of individual)* will be with you the whole time and will help you. Think about what will help you to not feel scared.



**Note to Caregiver:** Talk to the individual about the isolation suit. Talk about how the suit protects a person's clothes, the glasses/face shield protects the eyes, the mask protects the mouth and nose, and the gloves protect the hands. Talk about what you can do to help the individual not be afraid.

**IN THE DOCTORS OFFICE WAITING ROOM**  
**(IF TEST WILL BE DONE IN VEHICLE, GO TO PAGE 8)**

When you first get to your appointment, you might have to wait until someone calls your name.

(Name of caregiver) will stay in the waiting room with you.

Would you like to take a favorite book along to read or some of your favorite music to listen to on your headphones while you wait?



## WHEN YOUR NAME IS CALLED

When your name is called, a nurse will take you to the room where you will have the test done. (Name of caregiver) will be with you the whole time.

Remember, the nurse is dressed in a special uniform to help protect the nurse and you from the virus.

Try not to be afraid.



## HAVING TEST DONE IN VEHICLE

When you drive up to the testing center, a nurse will come to the vehicle and stand near the window where you are sitting.

(Name of caregiver) will roll down the window.

Remember, the nurse is dressed in a special uniform to help protect the nurse and you from the virus.

Try not to be afraid.



**Note to Caregiver:** Practice sitting with the individual in the vehicle that you will use. Roll the window down and have the individual practice placing his or her face by the open window and answering the questions listed above.

## TALKING WITH THE NURSE

The nurse will ask you questions about your health.

- ♦ Are you having trouble breathing?
  - ♦ Are you coughing?
- ♦ Have you been feeling really hot or really cold?
  - ♦ Have you been feeling extra tired?

The nurse might ask if you are having any other problems.

Your answers help the nurse and doctor know how to care for you. Tell what you are feeling.



**Note to Caregiver:** Help the individual prepare for the visit by writing down any symptoms and concerns ahead of time to take to the exam. Help the individual practice answering the questions listed above.

## COMPLETING THE TEST

The doctor or nurse will ask you to cough into your elbow, and then tilt your head backwards a bit.

(Name of caregiver) will be with you the whole time and will help you not be scared.

The doctor or nurse will put a long cotton swab in your nose. This might tickle or feel uncomfortable but will only take one or two seconds.

You must stay very still until the test is done.



**Note to Caregiver:** Practice having the individual cough into an elbow, tilt his or her head back, and stay still.

## **GREAT JOB! I KNOW YOU CAN DO IT!**

I know you can do it! You always do a great job!



***Note to Caregiver:*** Offer the individual praise and encouragement to celebrate success!

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Medline Plus. (2017, October 23). Nasopharyngeal culture. Retrieved April 6, 2020 from <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003747.htm>

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For additional information regarding a rehearsal guide or any of our physical or behavioral health trainings, please contact us.

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# Dealing with Fear/Anxiety Related to the COVID-19 Outbreak

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This is a scary and upsetting time for many people, especially individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. All of the information and news about COVID-19 can be difficult to understand and might spark anxiety. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) created a list of possible signs of fear and anxiety related to the outbreak, which include:

- **Excessive crying or irritation (yelling at others or lashing out at them, getting frustrated easily)**
- **Returning to past behaviors (for example, toileting accidents, bedwetting, self-injury)**
- **Excessive worry or sadness**
- **Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits (eating/sleeping too much or too little)**
- **Difficulty with attention and concentration**
- **Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past**
- **Unexplained headaches or body pain**
- **Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs (such as requesting medications more often than usual)**

To support individuals with I/DD through this situation:

- **Take time to talk about the COVID-19 outbreak.** Share facts and answer questions about COVID-19, phrasing the information in a way that is clear and understandable according to the person's needs (LINK: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/share-facts.html>). "COVID-19 Information By and For People with Disabilities," a plain language booklet created by self-advocates, is available at <https://selfadvocacyinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Plain-Language-Information-on-Coronavirus.pdf>.
- **Reassure individuals that they are safe.** Let them know it is ok to feel upset or scared. Share with them ways you deal with stress to help them learn how to cope. "Coronavirus Health and Safety," a video from ASERT (Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative) on is available at [https://paautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/1584048103.mp4?\\_=1](https://paautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/1584048103.mp4?_=1).
- **Limit exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media.** It is easy to misinterpret what is heard, which can increase fear and anxiety. Tips from the American Psychological Association for previewing news coverage related to COVID-19 are available at <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/pandemics?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=0ee63567-f3a1-4ba2-ba28-a0842a905c39>.
- **Try to maintain regular routines.** When day programs and public areas are closed, create a schedule with relaxing or fun activities. The ASERT website offers tips and suggestions for activities to keep individuals and caregivers active at <https://paautism.org/resource/coronavirus-resources/>. (In the "Resources and Information" section of the page, click on the "Supporting Individuals" header and then on the "Activities to Stay Engaged" link.)
- **Be a role model.** Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with friends and family members. The ASERT website offers tips for maintaining physical and mental health

during periods of social isolation at <https://paautism.org/resource/coronavirus-resources/>. (In the “Resources and Information” section of the page, click on the “Self Care” header and then on the “Physical Health” and “Mental Health” links.)

- **Reassure individuals with increased anxiety, about what you and they can control.** No one can make the virus disappear, but we can follow the advice of doctors to avoid getting sick and to help others avoid becoming sick, such as hand washing, social distancing. If the individual’s anxiety continues to increase, consider consulting a therapist/psychiatrist/physician for helpful interventions or medication needs. Caregiver tips for how to explain COVID-19 to individuals with I/DD is available at <https://www.yai.org/news-stories/blog/caregiver-tips-covid-19>.
- “A Social Story for Anxiety and COVID-19,” a resource for caregivers and self-advocates, is available at [https://www.yai.org/sites/default/files/documents/socialstory-anxiety-and-covid-19\\_0.pdf](https://www.yai.org/sites/default/files/documents/socialstory-anxiety-and-covid-19_0.pdf).

For more information and assistance, you may contact the KEPRO HCQU at <http://hcqu.kepro.com> or **1-888-321-5861**. If needed, mental health counselors are available through the SAMSHA Disaster Distress Helpline at **1-800-985-5590**. Visit their website at <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline> for more information, including options for those who need interpreters or those who feel more comfortable communicating via text messaging.

Resource:

*Information adapted from “Coronavirus Disease 2019 – Managing Anxiety and Stress” at [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2F coping.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2F coping.html)*

## Remaining Connected and Overcoming Boredom During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Elizabeth Hobbs, Clinical Educator

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues, people are being asked to remain at home in an effort to halt the spread of the coronavirus. For some, this can result in feelings of boredom and less connection to others. For individuals with I/DD, this can be particularly difficult as they may not have all of the coping skills they need to engage in self-care. Caregivers who recognize this can help an individual reduce feelings of boredom and disconnection to improve his or her mental well-being and lessen the impact of the ongoing pandemic.

### Remaining Connected

The following are some tips for caregivers to help people with I/DD remain connected:

- **Recognize the feelings that people are experiencing as real and understandable.** People who are extroverted may be used to engaging in activities outside the home, as well as frequently contacting their social network. The loss of outside activities can bring about sadness, anxiety and frustration. The loss of contact with others during a time of stress and uncertainty can feel isolating and lonely.
- **Validate people's feelings.** For example, say "It's ok to feel scared when you don't know what's going to happen," or "It's natural and OK to feel confused; a lot of things are different for you right now."
- **"Social distancing" does not mean social separation.** Prioritize staying connected, either virtually or via telephone. Help individuals you support to connect with their friends and family through phone calls, video conferencing, and online meetings. Make a plan of how, when, and with whom the person can get connected, and offer help make arrangements.
  - ❖ **Note:** For people with autism, video conferencing can be uncomfortable, due to the need for eye contact and the novelty of the experience. In this case, a phone call might be a better option. Caregivers and individuals should use their best judgement based on the needs of the individual.
  - ❖ Links to connect individuals to video conference those they miss:  
A caregiver may need to copy the link below and paste into the internet browser
    - <https://zoom.us/> (free download)
    - <https://www.skype.com/en/> (free download)
    - <https://duo.google.com/about/> (for android and Apple® users)
    - Facetime® - a video calling application designed for Apple® users
- **Make conversations meaningful.** Talk with the person about his or her feelings, hopes, or fears; be prepared to validate the person's thoughts and feelings. Meaningful conversations deepen a person's connection to others and eases feelings of loneliness.

- **Reframe “social distancing”.** Rather than “social distancing”, think of it as “physical distancing”. Emphasize that physically distancing from each other to stop the spread of disease is a good thing – it helps save lives. By staying away, each person is being a “lifesaver” or a “hero” keeping others safe.

Resources:

How To Be Alone, But Not Lonely, Despite The Coronavirus. NPR Morning edition (March 17, 2020). Retrieved 3-19-20 from <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/17/816691923/how-to-be-alone-but-not-lonely-despite-the-coronavirus>

How to Manage Loneliness During a Pandemic. 3 tips for remaining emotionally connected during social isolation. Psychology Today (March 13, 2020). Retrieved 3-19-20 from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-squeaky-wheel/202003/how-manage-loneliness-during-pandemic>

### Overcoming Boredom

There are many ways to fight boredom while practicing social distancing and being at home.

- **Exercise and stretch.** Look for simple ways for the individual to be active, according to his or her ability level. Even something as simple as getting up from a chair and sitting back down or going up and down the stairs several times in a row can be a good workout.
  - ❖ <https://www.specialolympics.org/> School of Strength.  
This website has exercise for those who want light exercise and those who want more intense workouts.
- **Get outside.** People may be outdoors, provided they maintain appropriate distance from others (at least 6 feet). Suggest going for a walk in a park, going fishing, or flying a kite. Just be sure to avoid places where others might gather, such as playgrounds and picnic areas.
- **Go for a drive.** Take a mini road trip. Time in the car is an opportunity to chat, listen to music or an audiobook, and enjoy the weather and scenery.
- **Have a dance party.** Encourage the person pick out fun, energizing songs; build a playlist together.
- **Get creative.** If the person enjoys creative projects, suggest creating plays, skits, songs, and/or dance routines to share with the person’s online friends, or make art projects.
- **Practice cooking/baking.** Have fun trying new recipes or perfecting old ones.
- **Do-it-yourself spa.** Turn the bathroom into a spa and have a home spa day.
- **Learn something new.** Explore new topics online together. There are many tutorials on YouTube, as well as blogs and online courses (i.e. Khan Academy). If an individual likes flowers, explore topics about gardening, types of flowers, arranging flowers, or anything else that the person finds interesting.
- **Visit new places.** Take virtual tours of museums and well-known locations in the world.
  - ❖ Virtual Museum Tours

<https://www.wpxi.com/entertainment/see-and-be-seen/bring-learning-10-must-see-virtual-tours/U2BW6Q3YTVAJ5JAERGO4TBXX4M/>

❖ Virtual Landmark Tour

<https://www.theactivetimes.com/virtual-tour-landmark>

Tour almost anything, from the Taj Mahal to The Space Center in Houston, TX.

- **Read.** Reading can be done alone or together. Bring a book or magazine, or share a favorite online blog with the person. Most library websites offer audiobooks available as free downloads.
- **Meditate and reflect.** A variety of online sources are available to help people learn and practice these skills. A video about basic meditation can be found at:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMMerxh\\_12U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMMerxh_12U)
- **Watch videos online.** Content available online content can differ from content on TV. Individuals might enjoy watching others play games, talk about topics that interest them, or unbox items.

Resources:

Morgan, H. , 15 Ways To Fight Boredom And Anxiety Amidst The Coronavirus Pandemic. Forbes. (March 17, 2020). Retrieved 3-19-20 from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/heathermorgan/2020/03/17/15-ways-to-fight-boredom-and-anxiety-amidst-the-coronavirus-pandemic/#68396f3515ef>

Collins, S., Ways to avoid boredom during COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing. WSPA news. (Posted: Mar 17, 2020/ Updated: Mar 19, 2020). Retrieved 3-19-20 from <https://www.wspa.com/news/coronavirus/ways-to-avoid-boredom-during-covid-19-pandemic-social-distancing/>