

Family & Consumer Sciences

What You Need to Know About Social Distancing, Self-quarantine and Self-isolation

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Social Distancing

Social distancing is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to limit the spread of coronavirus. Social distancing means avoiding close contact with others (keeping a distance of 6 feet or more), avoiding crowds, and suspending social practices, like shaking hands. Individuals can practice social distancing by avoiding places and events where keeping a 6-foot distance from others is unlikely or impossible. Organizations support social distancing when large gatherings are cancelled to slow virus spread.

Quarantine and Isolation

In addition to social distancing, the CDC recommends households be prepared if quarantine or isolation are needed. Quarantine and isolation help prevent or slow the spread of contagious diseases like COVID-19 by limiting exposure to people who have COVID-19 or those who may have been exposed to the virus.

Travelers to areas where COVID-19 is widespread have been asked to quarantine for 14 days. Others who have not travelled to these areas are choosing to self-quarantine at home. They may not be aware of COVID-19 exposure, but are staying home to reduce the risk of getting and spreading the disease.

Quarantine and isolation at home are being referred to as “self-quarantine” and “self-isolation.” These terms have been used interchangeably in news about coronavirus but mean different things.

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| Isolation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separates <i>people who are sick</i> from those who are not sick. • Recommended for people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or are showing symptoms. |
| Quarantine | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separates and limits movement of <i>people exposed</i> to a contagious disease to see if they become sick. • Allows for separation and observation. • Recommended when a person may have been exposed to coronavirus. |

Symptoms of COVID-19 may appear two to 12 days after virus exposure. The median time from exposure to showing symptoms is about five days. A person can spread the virus before they know they are sick.

Preparing to Self-Quarantine

You and your family may need to stay home for a period of time to limit coronavirus exposure. These actions are recommended to prepare for and manage self-quarantine.

- Stock up on a two-week supply of food and water for each household member.
- Refill prescription medications; have at least a 30-day supply.
- Make sure these medical and health supplies are on hand: fever and pain medicine, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen; cough and cold medicines; thermometer; fluids with electrolytes; soap and alcohol-based hand sanitizers; tissues, paper towels, toilet paper, feminine hygiene products; and garbage bags.

During Self-Quarantine

- Try to keep a regular routine. Create a schedule, plan activities and keep consistent sleep/wake times.
- Be creative with activities that can be done at home. Pick up old hobbies. Exercise using a DVD or online video.
- If you feel well and are not aware of COVID-19 exposure, consider outdoor activities in your yard or neighborhood (unless instructed otherwise by state/local authorities or public health officials). Practice social distancing.
- To manage stress, take breaks from news coverage about the pandemic and limit time spent scrolling through social media.

If you begin to feel ill while in self-quarantine, call your health care provider. Stay at home except to get medical care. Separate yourself from people and pets.

Preparing Your Home for Self-Isolation

You can take steps now to prepare if you or someone in your household becomes ill and needs to self-isolate.

- Choose a room in your home that can be used to separate sick household members from those who are healthy. If possible, designate a separate bathroom for the sick person to use. Plan to clean these rooms frequently if someone is sick and avoid unnecessary contact with the sick person.
- Ensure adequate medical and health supplies are on hand (see “Preparing to Self-quarantine” section).
- You may need help if you live alone and become sick during a COVID-19 outbreak. Stay in contact with others through phone and email. Ask others to check on you.
- Stay in touch with friends and family with chronic medical conditions.

If you are sick, wear a face mask around others (sharing a room or vehicle) and before entering a health care provider’s office. Limit your contact with people and pets if you become ill. There are no reports of virus spread to pets, but the CDC recommends limiting contact until more is known about the virus. Ask another person to take care of animals while you are sick.

Additional Resources from the CDC

- How to Prepare Your Family: tiny.utk.edu/COVID-19Prep
- Comprehensive information about caring for a person with COVID-19 at home: tiny.utk.edu/COVID-19athome
- CDC Information on what to do if you are sick: tiny.utk.edu/IfSick



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