COUNTY OF MONTEREY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Frequently Asked Questions

There is a lot of information and misinformation about COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus.

Here are some facts about the virus, how County Health and other agencies are preparing and will handle a COVID case and how we all can safeguard ourselves before and after a case has been detected.

What is COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus?

COVID-19 is respiratory disease caused by a new type of coronavirus. Coronaviruses themselves are not new and cause the common cold. However, this new coronavirus is one that has not been seen before. COVID-19 spreads the same way other coronaviruses do, through person-to-person contact. The illness can range from mild to serious.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- Fever greater than 100.5 F
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Some individuals have reported vomiting or diarrhea, but it is primarily a respiratory illness.

Most people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 experience mild illness. Older adults and people of all ages who have severe chronic medical conditions seem to be at higher risk for more serious COVID-19 illness. Early data suggest older people are twice as likely to have serious COVID-19 illness.

What is the County doing about COVID-19?

County Health Officials have been working to inform and safeguard the community since the beginning of this pandemic and will continue to do so. That preparation includes coordinating with local health partners including hospitals, urgent care centers, medical providers, laboratorians, and medical first responders, who are ready to act when needed. The County's Public Health Laboratory is conducting local testing for COVID-19.

How is testing for COVID-19 done?

Testing takes two steps. The first is being evaluated by a medical provider. If a medical provider determines that testing for COVID-19 should be done, he or she will collect a specimen by swabbing inside the nose. The medical provider sends the specimen to a laboratory where the second step occurs. The laboratory receives the specimen and runs special tests that look for the DNA of the new coronavirus. The laboratory reports the results of the test back to the medical provider, who provides them to the person being tested and counsels them on what they should do to take care of themselves. The Monterey County Public Health Laboratory, Laboratory Corporation of America and Quest Diagnostic laboratories perform the second part of the testing process but do not collect specimens for testing. Those must be collected at a medical facility such as doctor's office.

March 20, 2020

Should I get tested for COVID-19?

Not everyone needs to be tested for COVID-19. If you are healthy and not feeling sick, there is no need for you to be tested. If you are sick, please call your medical provider before visiting the office. There are three types of guidance you may receive: 1) Your medical provider may instruct you to stay home and use over the counter medications until you feel better. 2) He or she may request that you make an appointment to be examined, evaluated, and collect specimens for testing, or 3) If you are severely ill, your provider may refer you to an urgent care center or hospital emergency department.

What will happen when there is a case of the virus confirmed in Monterey County?

The patient and medical provider will be notified first. The Health Department would conduct a contact investigation, which means the Health Department will try to determine how the person got sick and to whom they might have spread the infection. What actions might be taken by the Health Department, such as isolation or testing, would be based each individual circumstance and on the current guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and the California Department of Public Health.

The public will also be notified, possibly through a press conference, that there is a positive case and what steps will be taken to ensure the health and safety of Monterey County residents. The Health Department will not provide specific information about individuals diagnosed with COVID-19, just enough information so that people are informed about their risk and actions they should take.

Because there is no specific treatment or vaccine to prevent COVID-19, everyone should follow the same advice given each year during influenza season to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses: wash your hands frequently, clean frequently touched surfaces, practice social distancing, and if you do get sick, cover your coughs with your elbow and stay home until you feel better and have been fever-free for at least 24 hours.

Some passengers from a cruise ship are being quarantined at Asilomar in Pacific Grove. Why did they come here? Asilomar meets the CDC's requirements for quarantine, and it is a state-owned facility.

> **Why can't the County tell me about the patients and quarantine?** The California Office of Emergency Services is handling this quarantine. They are providing information about the situation. You can find that information on the Health Department's COVID-19 webpage.

> **Does the County have any role in this quarantine?** No. However, the Monterey County Health Department and local hospitals are available to assist the state and federal teams should passengers need testing or a higher level of health care.

> **Does the presence of passengers increase my risk of contracting COVID-19?** We don't know the status of the passengers, so we can't speculate as to the nature of the risk.

Should I go to local events where there are lots of people?

The County is actively monitoring the rapidly changing guidance from the CDC and California Department of Public Health regarding limiting public gatherings and social distancing. Please see that information on the Health Department's COVID-19 webpage.

March 20, 2020

What can I do to protect myself?

We urge residents to continue to practice preventative measures such as handwashing. Many of the same steps residents take each year to protect themselves against seasonal flu will help reduce the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- Avoid touching your face with your hands;
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects often;
- Stay at least 6 feet away from a person who is ill;
- Consider delaying travel to areas with outbreaks of COVID-19; and
- If you haven't already, get an influenza shot. Influenza is still circulating in our communities.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you do get sick, to keep from spreading the virus to others:
- Stay home and avoid public or crowded areas;
- Cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow, not your hands;
- Consider the use of over-the-counter medications to reduce symptoms of fever, coughing, and congestion;
- Call your medical provider before visiting the office. Most otherwise healthy individuals with mild respiratory symptoms may not need to see a medical provider.
- Call your medical provider. He or she will advise you to stay home and take over the counter medications or provide additional guidance. Remember, not everyone who is ill needs to be tested for COVID-19.
- Reserve emergency room visits for serious illness and medical emergencies like injuries, difficulty breathing, chest pain, and altered levels of consciousness.

How can I prepare my household and family if one of us gets sick?

If you are concerned about a disruption due to the virus, using general preparedness methods may make you feel more secure, such as:
- Have a supply of all essential medications for your entire family;
- Make a childcare plan if you or your child's caregiver is sick or there is a school closure;
- Know how you can care for a sick family member without getting sick yourself.

March 20, 2020