



Guidelines for dialogue

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT COVID-19

Material for health workers



This material provides recommended responses for addressing different COVID-19-related topics during vaccination campaigns and informational activities, whether at health facilities or during home visits.

The aim of establishing an informed dialogue is to improve COVID-19 vaccine acceptance and administration rates. Therefore, whenever possible, an information session should be coupled with a vaccination session so individuals can act on the health expert's recommendations immediately.

The information published in this guide is based on data available through September 2022. Knowledge about the virus, disease, and vaccination is constantly being updated and recommendations may change.

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Questions about infection

How does COVID-19 spread?

1



- People with the infection may expel (by talking, coughing, or sneezing) small respiratory droplets containing the virus. These droplets can be inhaled (breathed in) by other people, who will also be infected.
- Sometimes the virus can spread from person to person through viral particles that are suspended in the air for minutes or hours. This can happen more easily in enclosed spaces with poor ventilation.
- Less commonly, the virus can spread when a person touches an object or surface where it has been deposited and then touches his or her mouth, nose, or eyes. COVID-19 is not spread through liquids or food.
- The risk of infection through surface contact is very unlikely. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that less than one infection occurs for every 10,000 times a surface with coronavirus is touched.
- The virus that causes COVID-19 is not spread through water or swimming.

How can I protect myself from COVID-19?

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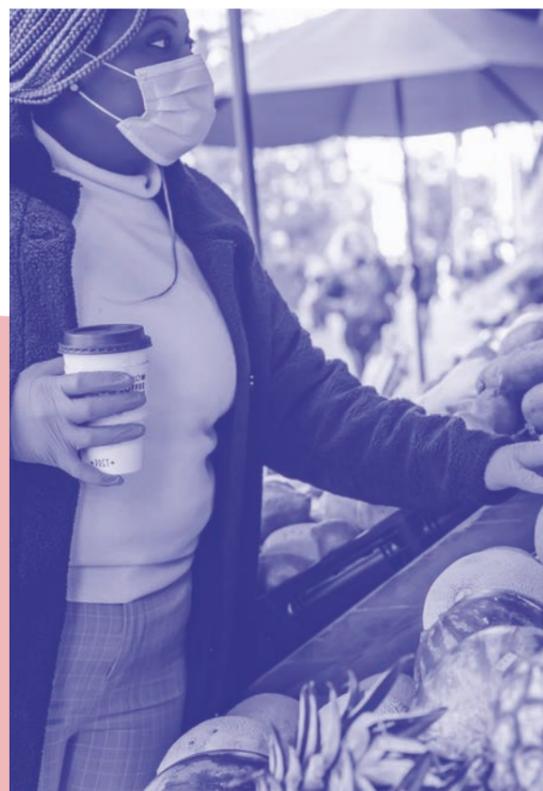
- Get vaccinated. The vaccines are safe and they work.
- Complete your vaccination schedule with all recommended doses. Ask for them at the health center closest to your home.
- Wear surgical masks and avoid masks with valves.
- Children under 2 should not wear a mask.
- Keep a physical distance of more than one meter from other people.
- Ventilate spaces, open the windows.
- Avoid crowds in open or closed places.
- Wash your hands frequently. You can use soap and water or hand sanitizer gel with 70% alcohol.
- Cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow or a tissue.
- Avoid contact with people who have symptoms such as cough, fever, or runny nose, as well as people who have tested positive for COVID-19.
- Soap and water are the best option for cleaning surfaces and objects. You can also disinfect them with bleach.



Are there medicines, foods, or drinks that can make me immune to COVID-19?

3

- No, there are no medicines, foods, or drinks to prevent you from contracting the COVID-19 virus.
- However, it is important to maintain a balanced diet to strengthen defenses and prevent diseases
- Follow these recommendations:
 - Eat foods prepared at home.
 - Avoid foods and drinks with excess fat and sugar.
 - Consume five servings of fruit every day.
 - Include vegetables at lunch and dinner.
 - Include healthy fats like peanuts, avocado, and olive oil.
 - Maintain good hydration, drink at least eight glasses of water a day.
 - Consume meat and dairy in moderation.



What early symptoms might indicate that I have COVID-19?

4

- The most common symptoms are cough, fever or chills, runny nose, headache, body aches, sore throat, fatigue, loss of taste and smell, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. Some people have small, red (flat or raised) spots on their skin, which can cause itching or pain.
- Symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus.
- Pay attention to warning signs. If someone has any of these symptoms, go to the emergency room:
 - Difficulty breathing
 - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
 - Confusion
 - Drowsiness or inability to wake up
 - Pale, gray, or bluish skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone
 - Difficulty breathing. Ask your health care provider about the possibility or necessity of measuring your oxygen level at home.
- If you have any other serious or worrisome symptoms, go to a doctor's office, hospital emergency room, or the nearest health center.

Important

- If you suspect you have COVID-19, or have lived with someone you know has it, you should go into isolation; that is, refrain from physical contact with others to avoid transmitting the virus to them in case you have been infected. Check with your health care professional to see how many days you should stay in isolation.
- Monitor your health and be alert to any symptoms of COVID-19.
- If you have any of the warning signs (such as difficulty breathing), you should seek immediate medical attention.
- Always follow the advice of the national health authority on when and how to seek medical attention.

What steps should I take during my COVID-19 isolation if I live with someone else?

- If you have become ill, during isolation you should:
 - Monitor for symptoms.
 - If you develop any warning signs (such as shortness of breath or persistent cough), seek medical attention immediately.
 - If possible, stay in a separate room from the rest of the people living in the house.
 - Avoid contact with other household members and pets.
 - Stay at least one meter away from other people.
 - Do not share personal items, such as cups, towels, and eating utensils.
 - Whenever you have contact with other people, both you and they should wear a mask.
 - Do not eat with other family members.
 - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use a gel hand sanitizer (70% alcohol).
 - Try to keep the windows open to maintain adequate ventilation.
 - If you have difficulty breathing, go to the nearest health center. Ask your health care provider about the possibility or necessity of measuring your oxygen level at home.

Also, if you live with someone who has been infected:

- Open windows or doors to ventilate the space.
- Avoid sleeping next to the sick person.
- Don't share personal items with them.

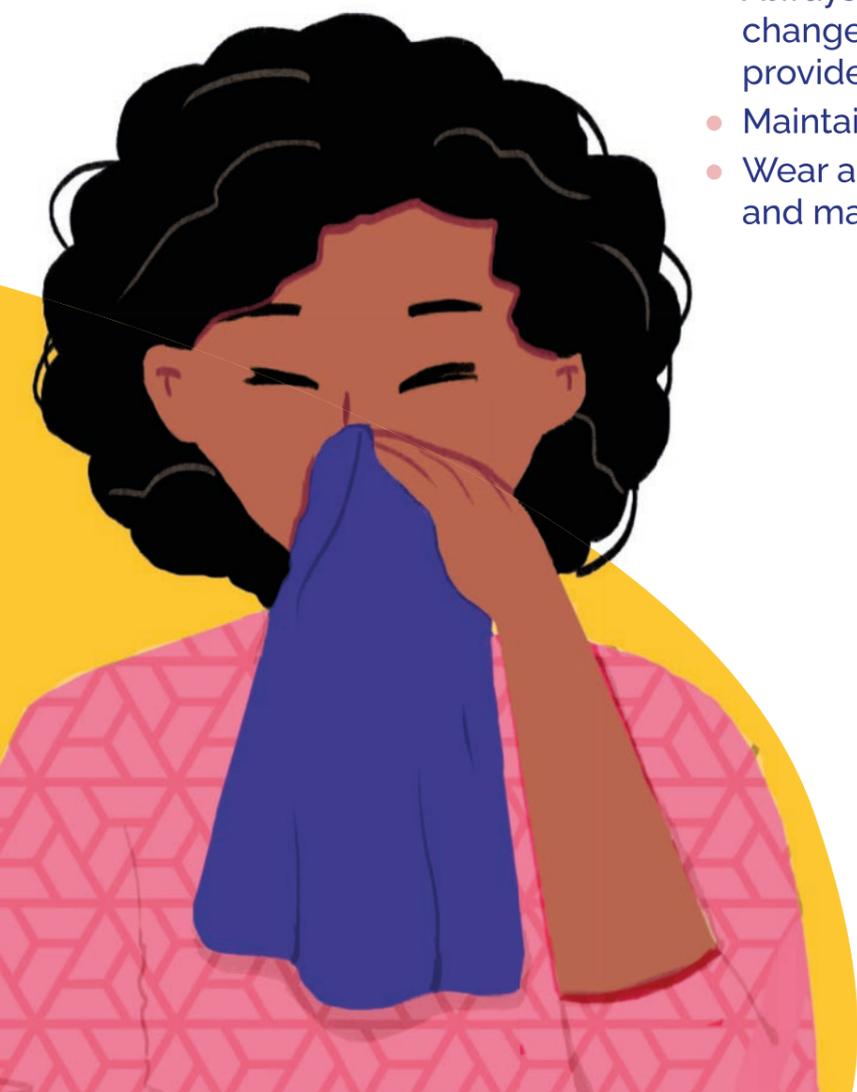
As soon as it is confirmed that I have COVID-19, do I need to tell everyone I have had recent physical contact with? And everyone I will be living with while I have the disease?

- Yes, it is very important to let all your close contacts know you have COVID-19 so they can isolate themselves and get tested.
- A close contact is anyone with whom you have been less than one meter away for a combined total of 15 minutes or more during a 24-hour period.
- People you have been with during the two days before onset of symptoms (or, if you are asymptomatic, the two days before your positive test result) and up to the time you begin isolation, are at higher risk of infection and should be notified first.



Will COVID-19 affect me more if I have asthma?

- Yes. People with moderate, severe, or uncontrolled asthma are more likely to experience serious complications, be hospitalized, or die from COVID-19. Therefore, patients with asthma are a priority group to receive the vaccine.
- If you have asthma, follow these recommendations:
 - Get vaccinated against pneumonia, flu (or influenza), and COVID-19 according to schedule.
 - Keep your appointments to ensure that the disease is well controlled.
 - Avoid other asthma triggers such as dust, allergens, or exposure to cold.
 - Always take your medicines and do not change them unless your health care provider tells you to.
 - Maintain good hand hygiene.
 - Wear a mask unless you are too sick and maintain physical distance.



Important

If you have one or more of the following conditions, you should be vaccinated, as failing to do so increases the risk of hospitalization, severe illness, and death if you get COVID-19:

- Arteriosclerosis
- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Cardiovascular disease
- Liver disease
- Neurological disease
- Lung disease
- Kidney disease
- Arterial hypertension
- Immunodeficiency from any cause
- Obesity
- People over 60 years of age
- Pregnant women

How long does the virus stay in my body during the incubation stage?

8

- The incubation period is the time between when a person was exposed to/contracted the virus and the onset of symptoms.
- The incubation period for COVID-19 is generally 2 to 14 days after exposure, with an average of 5 days. People can spread the disease even 2 days before the onset of symptoms, during the incubation period.

Will being physically fit prevent me from getting COVID-19?

9

- No, exercising won't prevent you from getting sick with COVID-19, but physical activity helps keep our immune system (defenses) in peak condition.
- Physical activity can reduce the effects of the virus, mitigate symptoms, and reduce the likelihood of developing serious complications.

Is chlorine dioxide in small doses an effective way to prevent infection? Does ivermectin work against COVID-19 or does it put my body at risk?

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- No, chlorine dioxide will not prevent you from getting COVID-19. Remember that this product is not a medicine and serious cases have been reported due to its use.
- Please note that the efficacy, safety, and quality of chlorine dioxide have not been evaluated. There are no studies that support its use, which has not been approved by international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the United States of America.
- Ivermectin is not approved for the prevention or treatment of COVID-19.
- Available data do not show that ivermectin is effective against COVID-19. Therefore, do not use it to prevent or treat the disease, as its benefits and safety for these purposes have not been established.
- Ivermectin is used in humans to fight infections caused by parasitic worms and to treat head lice and certain skin conditions, such as rosacea.
- Taking large doses of ivermectin is dangerous.

Important

Remember that, at the slightest suspicion of being sick, the person should go to their health care provider, nearest health center, or locally recommended places to be tested for COVID-19.

Are there any natural or over-the-counter medicines that can help me prevent COVID-19?



- No, to date, there is no drug or natural medicine that can prevent you from contracting COVID-19.
- Natural medicine has been used for a long time and provides certain benefits. It can be used as a complement. You can drink eucalyptus tea if that makes you feel better.
- Avoid inhaling or nebulizing eucalyptus or applying products such as ointments to your chest. This can irritate and inflame the airways and worsen symptoms such as coughing.

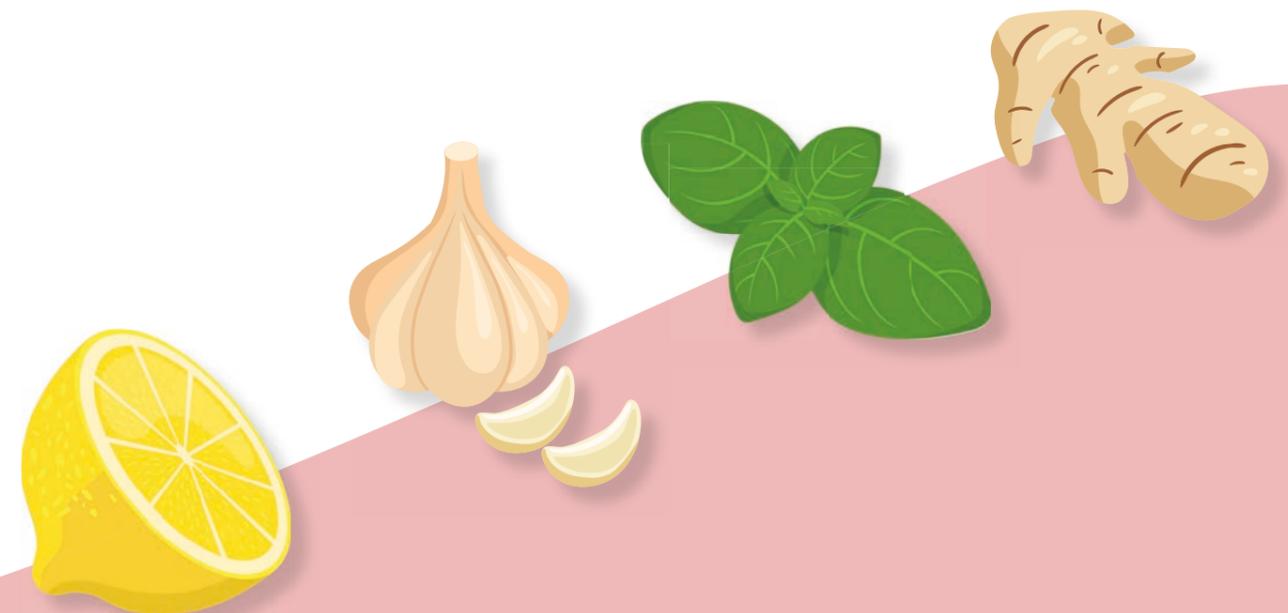


Questions about care during infection

What natural medicine will help me if I get the disease? Are there proven natural treatments that work against COVID-19?



- There is no evidence that natural medicine is a treatment for COVID-19. Many studies are being conducted on COVID-19 and natural medicine.
- You can drink any tea; it will not harm you. Some people feel good when they drink cinnamon, mint, eucalyptus, ginger, garlic, or lemon tea. Chamomile may relieve some symptoms.
- Avoid inhaling or vaporizing these natural products. Visiting saunas or steam baths will not help you and could put people there at risk of infection.
- Avoid going out while you have COVID-19.



What over-the-counter medicine will help me while I have COVID-19?

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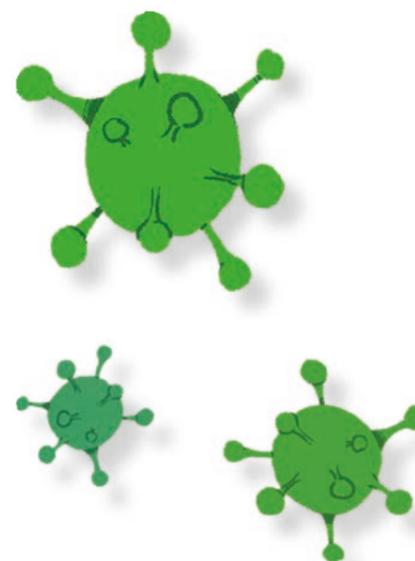
- As a first option, go to the nearest health center for advice on the most appropriate treatment for the disease and the discomfort it causes. Pharmacies offer commonly used medications that do not require a prescription and will help ease these discomforts.
- You can buy ibuprofen, acetaminophen, or paracetamol to relieve fever and general malaise or body aches.
- Do not self-medicate and do not take aspirin, blood thinners, steroids, or antibiotics during illness. Consult with a medical professional before taking these medications.
- Remember that taking aspirin in large amounts can cause serious effects, such as stomach ulcers, bleeding from those ulcers, severe allergies, and an increased risk of having a stroke from bleeding.
- If you are prescribed any medication, you should adhere to the prescription and follow the doctor's instructions.



How long does the disease last for those who are asymptomatic?

3

- Usually 10 days. It is recommended that anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 (even if they have no symptoms) should isolate themselves at home to break the chain of transmission of the virus.
- Watch for symptoms. If none appear, you can be near other people again, keeping the recommended physical distance, 10 days after you tested positive.
- Don't forget to isolate, even if you feel fine. We must be responsible to others and avoid infecting those around us.
- Remember that people who have the virus but have no symptoms (asymptomatic) and those who do not yet have symptoms (pre-symptomatic) can transmit the virus.



Can I play sports if I have COVID-19 but have no symptoms?

4

- Remember that even if you feel well, you need to self-isolate; you should not go to the gym during this period. You can exercise outdoors, as long as you are not in contact with other people, so it is not recommended that you exercise in a public space.
- Generally, you don't need to avoid physical activity when you have mild illnesses. However, activities that cause excessive fatigue or shortness of breath should be avoided.
- It is preferable to start with light exercises, such as stretching and walking. You can also practice yoga, since the basis of yoga is deep breathing.
- After you finish isolation, you can increase the frequency and intensity of physical activity, according to your ability.

Can COVID-19 cause conditions such as stroke, cardiorespiratory arrest, or cardiovascular arrest?

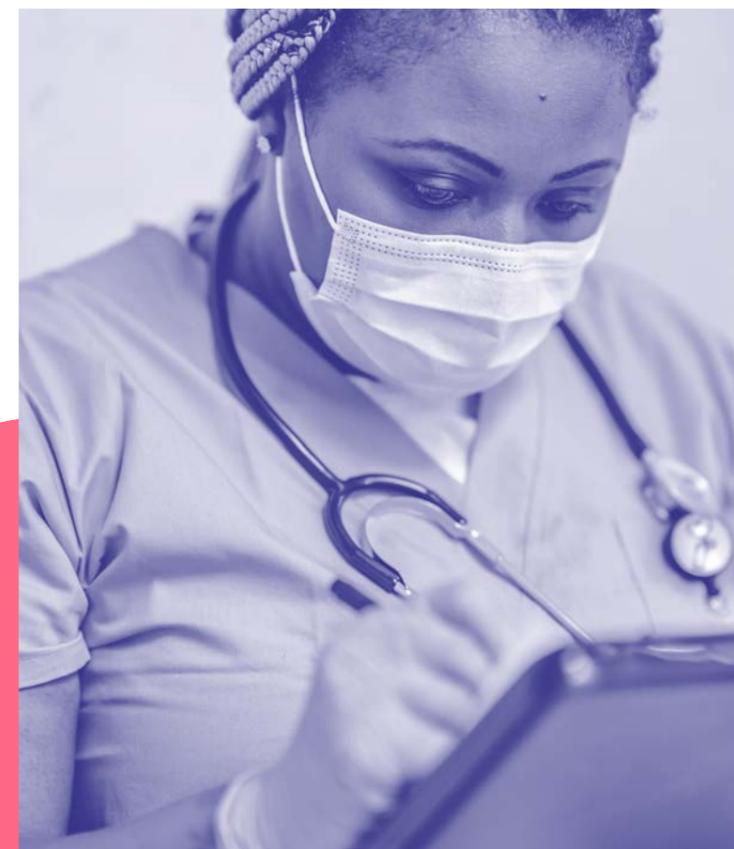
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- Yes, patients with severe disease may develop cardiovascular complications. Some people may have heart attacks; arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat); clots in the lung, legs, or brain; or myocarditis.
- People with COVID-19 and preexisting cardiovascular disease are at increased risk of severe illness and death.

What symptoms are considered "severe" in COVID-19 patients?

6

- Pay attention to warning signs. If someone has any of these symptoms, go to the emergency room:
 - Difficulty breathing
 - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
 - Confusion
 - Drowsiness or inability to wake up
 - Pale, gray, or bluish skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone.
- If you have any other serious or worrisome symptoms, go to a doctor's office, hospital emergency room, the nearest health center, or place indicated by local authorities.



What if someone drinks alcohol, smokes, or uses drugs while they have COVID-19?

- Alcohol consumption is never recommended. Consuming alcohol may increase the risk of acute respiratory failure syndrome and pneumonia, which are often associated with COVID-19.
- Drinking alcohol weakens your body's ability to fight infection, increases your risk of complications, and makes it harder to recover from the disease.
- Current or past cigarette smoking may increase your chances of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19.
- Using drugs can increase the risk of severe illness and complications associated with COVID-19.



What precautions should I take if I get COVID-19 while pregnant?

8

- Follow the same directions as anyone else with the disease:
 - Stay home.
 - Maintain physical distance of at least one meter. If you are near other people, wear a mask.
 - Monitor your symptoms.
 - Contact your health care provider.
 - Get medical help right away if you have bleeding, severe headache, severe nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath, chest tightness, or confusion.



If I have COVID-19 and my symptoms are getting worse, when should I go to a hospital?

9

- If you or someone with COVID-19 has any of these symptoms, go to the emergency room:
 - Difficulty breathing
 - Persistent coughing
 - Confusion
 - Oxygen saturation level below 94%
 - Drowsiness or inability to wake up
 - Pale, gray, or bluish skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone.
- If you have any other serious or worrisome symptoms, go to the emergency room or as directed by your health ministry or healthcare provider.

Questions about aftercare

Can I catch COVID-19 more than once?

1

- Yes, there are cases of reinfection. It is not yet known for sure how many times a person can be reinfected, as the virus continues to evolve.
- Getting vaccinated, even if you have had the disease, reduces your risk of reinfection.

After getting infected, can I stop wearing a mask?

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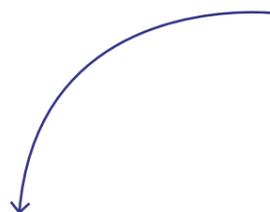
- Consider wearing a mask in public, especially in crowded or poorly ventilated areas. This slows down the chain of transmission.
- Masks do not replace the practice of physical distancing. Besides keeping a distance of at least one meter, you should also wear a mask, especially when you are in enclosed spaces and among people you do not live with.



How long will the side effects of COVID-19 last?

3

- Most people get better within a few weeks of being sick. However, others experience symptoms that persist for at least two months. These symptoms may be similar to those of the initial disease, or they may be completely different.
- Persistent COVID-19, also known as long-standing COVID-19, is diagnosed three months after illness onset when symptoms cannot be explained by an alternative diagnosis.



Among the most common symptoms are the following:

- Persistent COVID-19, also known as long COVID-19, is diagnosed three months after disease onset when symptoms cannot be explained by an alternative diagnosis. The most common symptoms include:
 - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
 - Tiredness or fatigue
 - Symptoms that worsen after physical or mental activities
 - Difficulty thinking or concentrating
- Persistent coughing
- Chest or stomach pain
- Headache
- Rapid or pounding heartbeat
- Muscle or joint pain
- Tingling sensation
- Diarrhea
- Trouble sleeping
- Fever
- Dizziness (vertigo) when standing up
- Rash
- Changes in mood
- Changes in taste or smell
- Neurological effects

Some women have reported temporary changes in menstrual periods after having COVID-19 or after being vaccinated. We still need more research. Keep in mind that menstrual cycles can be affected by multiple causes, including other infections, stress, sleep problems, and changes in diet or exercise.



Will I need to take medicines for life after getting COVID-19?

4

- Most patients will recover and will not need to take lifelong medication.
- Some patients may develop complications, depending on the severity of the disease, and may require medical follow-up and special treatments.
- Most people regain their health within a few weeks. Many will feel fine after 14 days, so they won't need to see a doctor afterward.

I had asymptomatic COVID-19. If I am infected again, will I be asymptomatic again?

5

- Most reported COVID-19 reinfections have been milder than the first encounters with the virus, although some have been more severe; some second infections have even resulted in death. It is important to get vaccinated, even if you have already had COVID-19.

If I have already been vaccinated and then had COVID-19, should I get revaccinated?

6

- If you received the first dose of the vaccine and then became infected, you should receive the second dose after you recover.
- If you have received all the recommended doses and are infected, you do not need to be revaccinated.
- If you haven't been vaccinated, you should do so, even if you've already had COVID-19.

How long can I infect others after I have recovered from COVID-19?

7

7-10

days after the beginning of symptoms people are no longer contagious

- Most people stop being contagious between 7 and 10 days after the onset of symptoms.
- You can be with other people once these three conditions are met:
 - 10 days have passed since your symptoms went away or since you tested positive.
 - You have been fever-free for 24 hours (no need for fever-reducing medications).
 - Other COVID-19 symptoms are improving.
- These recommendations do not apply to people with severe COVID-19.

This material has been prepared based on documents from the Ministry of Health of Guatemala and with the support of the PAHO Country Office in Guatemala.

