

Social Distancing

Disclaimer: I am not your doctor and this is not medical advice. This is educational material. If you are ill, contact your physician. While great effort has gone into trying to provide correct information, data on this disease is quickly progressing. Look for updated information.

The most important thing we can do as a community to prevent harm from the Covid-19 pandemic is to lower its reproduction rate, its R_0 . It is unlikely that we can change the virus' behavior, and as of today we don't have a vaccine or much in the way of preventive medications. We can stay healthy, get enough sleep. The best things we can do improve our defense by improving our health, use hygiene to limit contagion, and use social-distancing to avoid getting or spreading the infection.

Perhaps the principal public health lesson I have learned from this disease (and I am apparently board certified in Public Health) is that each small thing we can do to lower the R_0 is important. If we assume that COVID-19 has an R_0 of 2.8, and people do three interventions, each which cuts the transmission rate by a third, that can halt the pandemic. Even if an intervention only lowers transmission risk by 10%, it can help slow the spread of the virus and save lives.

Of course, shutting down schools. For a category five pandemic, the CDC has recommended closing schools for 12 weeks as soon as there is local spread. We have reached that point in many areas for the United States. Thus schools may close until summer.

Stay home, avoid crowds.

Generally, I try to look for humor in pretty much every situation. For this pandemic, try to find a way to lower risk in every situation. Here are some ideas:

Go shopping less frequently, and buy enough to last longer. Make a list so that you know what to buy, don't forget items, and get it done more quickly. Shop at one store if possible to limit the number of contacts you will have.

Don't work as a cashier. Cashiers are exposed to hundreds of people a day, and then they handle items you will use at home, including your groceries. Assume that the cashier will be spreading the virus.

Use self-checkout stations if available.

Use a credit card and decline a receipt. Avoid using cash as it is a fomite that can transfer viruses (but keep some cash for emergency use).

Do your shopping during the slowest hours of the day and week. Google the store, it will tell you the hours that the store it is least busy. The first hour in the morning is generally the best time. There will be less people and less airborne droplets. The cashier's hands will likely be less contaminated in the morning than later in the day.

Bring as little extraneous material into the house and especially the kitchen as possible. Grocery bags, boxes, junk mail does not need to come inside. Have a bin to throw out junk mail so it does not even come inside. Sanitize hands after touching the mail

Work from home if possible.

Avoid public restrooms.

If you go to church, do it from home if possible. If Catholic and you feel obligated to attend, do the 7:00 A.M. mass that is poorly attended.

You may want to shop and church at places where you do not know people so that you do not feel obligated to be polite and socialize with people you encounter. If you see acquaintances that want to chat, tell them you are in a rush, but would love to chat and tell them to give you a call, as you rush off

Avoid communal gathering sites at work. Bring your own coffee and snacks and avoid communal coffee makers that are touched by many people. Don't shake hands.

Wipe down your desk/work surfaces and objects you will be touching at work at least twice a day if there is risk of exposure from droplets settling on them at work. Use Clorox wipes, 70% isopropyl alcohol or 3% hydrogen peroxide. Keep hand sanitizer at your work station and use it after contact with other people.

Keep hand sanitizer in your vehicle and sanitize your hands every time you get back into the car, and clean the steering wheel.

In warm sunny weather, a car may help as a sanitation chamber for things like mail – parking the car in the sun in warm weather will get the inside of the car hot enough to kill most of the viruses on surfaces after several hours. Sunlight also acts as a disinfectant.

Wash hands, and wash clothing after coming home, and take a shower and shampoo. Shampoo should inactivate the viruses. If you are unable to shampoo, at least use a hot brush or hair iron to heat the hair. Flat irons get 350 to 450° F. These grooming tools will heat the hair sufficiently to kill the virus droplets that have landed in the hair. Laundry detergent should also kill the virus. Even just putting the cloths in the dryer should greatly reduce risk. A clothes dryer heats the air to 125° F on delicate and around 135° F on medium or high. A thirty minute drying cycle should be enough to kill most of the viruses on clothing.