

# Reinforce Infection Control Measures in Light of Coronavirus

**The "COVID-19" coronavirus outbreak will put the spotlight on ways to limit the spread of respiratory infections.**

This virus is thought to be transmitted mainly by respiratory secretions...similar to other coronaviruses, such as SARS and MERS.

Use this coronavirus outbreak as an opportunity to stress proper infection control measures.

**Reinforce proper hand hygiene.** Explain that frequent handwashing with soap and water is the best bet. Advise washing for 20 seconds...about the time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.

If that's not practical, suggest using a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. They're effective against enveloped viruses, such as coronaviruses...but aren't yet proven to kill COVID-19.

Use a disinfectant spray or wipe to clean counters, phones, etc.

**Clear up mask confusion.** Caution that unnecessary use is leading to shortages. Plus masks only work along with hand hygiene.

Discourage masks for most people withOUT symptoms...there's no evidence they help protect these patients. Masks are too loose to keep all germs out...and viruses can get in through the eyes.

But it's okay if patients WITH respiratory symptoms want to wear a surgical mask to help contain their secretions...especially if they're in contact with infants, elderly, or immunocompromised people.

If patients ask about N95 respirators, point out these need to be properly fitted...and are hard to wear for more than a few minutes.

Find more advice to share with patients in our CEs, *Hand Hygiene for Infection Control and Preventing the Spread of Colds and Flu*.

3/13/20 - This article was revised to reflect the current population risk in North America. Please keep in mind that this is a rapidly changing landscape.

## Key References:

- [www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019](http://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019) (2-27-20)
- [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza/health-professionals.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza/health-professionals.html) (2-27-20)
- [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/fluwatch/2018-2019/week30-34-july-21-august-24-2019.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/fluwatch/2018-2019/week30-34-july-21-august-24-2019.html) (2-27-20)
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- [www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks](http://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks) (2-27-20)

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