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The Coronavirus: How to Stay Safe

As China's epidemic continues to spread, things may seem scary. Here are 10 simple precautions that can protect you from contracting the coronavirus.

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Coronavirus Pandemic

Take-Aways

- To protect yourself against coronavirus, wear gloves while in public spaces. Change them daily.
- If you must remove your gloves, do not touch your face.
- Instead of relying on a mask, avoid crowds and keep about 1.5 to 3 feet (half to full meter) between you and other people.
- Provide designated bathing and hand towels for each member of your household. Wash each towel twice a week.
- Be wary of door knobs and any other object other people's hands frequently touch. If you must touch one, wash your hands immediately.
- Avoid shared kitchen utensils and don't take food from a serving dish with your personal eating utensils.
- Don't purchase, butcher or eat live animals or fish.
- Aim for good ventilation in your home or office.
- If you're caring for someone with a fever, both of you should wear a mask. Wear gloves when handling objects they've used, and otherwise practice careful hygiene.

Recommendation

Award-winning journalist Laurie Garrett shares her best tips for staying safe in the midst of an epidemic in this level-headed, informative *Foreign Policy* article. Garrett has been on the scene of more than 30 outbreaks. She willingly traveled to Hong Kong and China during the 2002-03 SARS epidemic, spending time in rooms with doctors, nurses and patients to get news from ground zero out to the rest of the world. She never contracted the diseases she reported about. Her advice is clear, concise and easy to follow and will be valuable as the coronavirus is spreading – and during flu seasons in years to come.

Summary

To protect yourself against coronavirus, wear gloves while in public spaces. Change them daily.

The gloves don't have to be latex – cold weather gloves or mittens should suffice. Don't take them off as long as you're in public spaces. Keep enough pairs of gloves in rotation so you can wear a clean, dry pair each day. [Editor's note: The virus that causes coronavirus disease, COVID-19, and the 2019-20 coronavirus outbreak is officially referred to as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, SARS-CoV-2.]

If you must remove your gloves, do not touch your face.

Some occasions call for bare hands. If you can't wear your gloves, avoid touching your face until you can wash your hands.

“Do not touch your face or eyes, no matter how much something itches.”

As soon as you can, put your gloves back on – but only after you've washed thoroughly between your fingers and all over your hands with warm water and soap.

Instead of relying on a mask, avoid crowds and keep about a 1.5 to 3 feet (half to full meter) between you and other people.

When you breathe into a mask all day, the inside becomes glazed with everything you breathe, cough or sneeze out. Bacteria will happily breed there, making masks smelly and foul after a day or two.

“I rarely wear a face mask in an epidemic, and I have been in more than 30 outbreaks.”

Rather than depending on a mask to save you, keep your distance. Don't hug or shake hands, and keep about 1.5 feet (roughly half a meter) between yourself and other people. If someone is coughing, double that distance and ask the person to put on a mask so their possibly contaminated respiratory drops don't infect others.

Provide designated bathing and hand towels for each member of your household. Wash each towel twice a week.

Wash all of your towels, whether hand towels in the kitchen or bath towels in the bathroom. Provide each of your housemates with a clean towel, and tell them to use only that towel. Putting each person's name on a towel will help them avoid confusion. Wash the towels and any damp surfaces often.

Be wary of door knobs and any other object other people's hands frequently touch. If you must touch one, wash your hands immediately.

Remember your gloves, and if you must touch a shared object with bare hands, wash your hands immediately.

Avoid shared kitchen utensils and don't take food from a serving dish with your personal eating utensils.

In many parts of the world, including China, it's customary to use one's personal chopsticks to move food from a shared serving dish to one's own bowl or plate, then use the same chopsticks to move food to one's mouth. Avoid this until the outbreak is over. Use a serving spoon instead. Tell children to avoid sharing dishes, cups, bottles or utensils, and select restaurants with care.

Don't purchase, butcher or eat live animals or fish.

Which animal spread the virus to humans is still unclear. Until authorities find out, avoid bringing any new live animal into your home.

Aim for good ventilation in your home or office.

Viruses dislike good ventilation. Open doors and windows to let in fresh air unless it's too cold.

If you're caring for someone with a fever, both of you should wear a mask. Wear gloves when handling objects they've used, and otherwise practice careful hygiene.

Tight-fitting masks, gloves and long-sleeved clothing can be protective when working with a sick person in close quarters. Wear gloves when touching anything the sick person has touched, including masks and other disposable items. Wash any items that have been in contact with the sick person in hot, soapy water. If you can, put your patient in an isolated area of the house, and if the weather isn't too cold, keep the window open.

About the Author

Laurie Garrett formerly served as a senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations. She won a Pulitzer Prize in 1996 for her coverage of the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



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