

2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Safety and Health Guidance for Non-Healthcare Workers Working for NYC Government

Note: This guidance is intended for non-healthcare workers working for NYC government. It may be modified as other available information and/or guidance warrants.

2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

Health officials are still learning about how a newly discovered respiratory virus, 2019-nCoV, spreads and how severe infection with it can be. Based on current information, the health risk to non-healthcare workers is considered low because there is no evidence that person-to-person transmission is occurring in New York City. That assessment may change in the weeks to months ahead. This guide provides information about coronaviruses and how infections from respiratory viruses can be prevented.

About Coronaviruses

Coronaviruses are common in many different species of animals, including camels and bats. Rarely, these coronaviruses, like 2019-nCoV, can emerge that infect humans and then spread between humans. Recent examples of this include SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV.

Transmission

Human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through:

- the air by coughing or sneezing.
- close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands.
- touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands.

General Infection Prevention Strategies

While the risk to non-healthcare workers is considered low at this time, NYC government employees are always encouraged to routinely employ infection prevention strategies that can prevent transmission of common respiratory viruses (e.g., influenza or “flu,” “common cold viruses”). These include:

- stay home if you are sick.
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (in the absence of a tissue, cough or sneeze into your shirt sleeve or bent arm).
- keep your hands clean (wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds). Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- get the flu shot (at this time, there are no current vaccinations for coronaviruses).

The routine use of these infection prevention strategies cannot be overemphasized.

Face Masks for Non-Healthcare Workers

For non-healthcare settings:

- wearing a face mask is not recommended.
- face masks are not warranted based on general/routine tasks – even those with frequent interaction with the general public.
- use of face masks while not at work would be a personal choice, though it is not recommended by public health authorities.
- no coronavirus-specific precautions are recommended for interactions with the general public, including asymptomatic travelers (i.e., persons showing no symptoms) from affected parts of the world.

Cleaning of Public/Common Areas in Non-Healthcare Facilities

If work activities require cleaning of lobbies and other common areas in public spaces and there is concern over 2019 novel coronavirus, enhanced cleaning of “high-touch” areas can help support infection control measures.

Standard cleaning and safety protocols are appropriate for such cases. General precautions include:

- wear disposable gloves (additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as those found in a Universal Precautions Kit can be considered).
- do not use compressed air for cleaning.
- remove and discard gloves if they become soiled or damaged and after cleaning activities are concluded.
- wipe down frequently touched surfaces with an EPA-registered low- or intermediate-level disinfectant (products with label claims against human coronaviruses should be used according to label instructions).
- use soap and water to wash hands after cleaning. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer, provided that hands are not visibly soiled.
- if visibly soiled (e.g., vomitus), follow your agency’s exposure control plan which may include enhanced precautions. Soiled items must be placed in a biohazard bag (or plastic bag labeled “biohazard” if a biohazard bag not available).