



Tucson Pima Collaboration
To End Homelessness

COVID-19

PROMOTING VACCINE CONFIDENCE
AMONG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



PIMA COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

CHAPTER 2 COVID-19 BASICS

This chapter is excerpted from TPCCH's Promoting COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence Toolkit for Homeless Advocates and Service Providers.

Toolkit Chapters

Download at <https://www.tpch.net/vaccine-toolkit>

Introduction: Overview of the toolkit's purpose, commonly used terms, and updates.

Chapter 1 - Vaccine Ambassadorship: Introduction to vaccine ambassadorship and the important role that homeless advocates can play in building vaccine confidence and uptake among people experiencing homelessness.

Chapter 2 - COVID-19 Basics: Basic information about SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19 illness, and risk management.

Chapter 3 - COVID-19 Vaccines: General information about currently available COVID-19 vaccines.

Chapter 4 - Vaccine Hesitancy: An introduction to vaccine hesitancy, common concerns expressed by people experiencing homelessness, and the relationship between racial trauma and vaccine hesitancy.

Chapter 5 - Promoting Vaccine Confidence: Tailored strategies to address common vaccine concerns among people experiencing homelessness, and sample responses to those concerns using messages that are proven to work.

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Chapter 2: COVID-19 Basics

While you do not need to be a medical professional or public health specialist to help PEH understand COVID-19 and build vaccine confidence, it is important to understand what is known about COVID-19, how it is spread, and who is at the highest risk.

COVID-19 and Symptoms

Sources: [U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention Community-Based Organizations Vaccine Toolkit](#) and [“Symptoms of Coronavirus”](#) webpage.

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, can result in a range of illnesses, from mild symptoms to severe illness and death. About 30% of persons infected with SARS-CoV-2 do not have symptoms. No one can predict how severe any person’s illness might be, but certain factors may increase their risk.

People experiencing homelessness are at risk of COVID-19.

Homeless services are often provided in congregate settings, which could facilitate the spread of infection. Because many people experiencing homelessness are older adults or have underlying medical conditions, they may also be at [increased risk for severe illness](#).

According to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), anyone can have mild to severe symptoms. Older adults and people who have severe underlying medical conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes seem to be at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19 illness.

List of Most Common Symptoms

- Fever
- Cough
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Nausea
- Diarrhea

Other symptoms are [signs of serious illness](#). If someone has trouble breathing, chest pain or pressure, or difficulty staying awake, they should get medical care immediately.

Influenza and COVID-19: Key Differences

Source: [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “Symptoms of Coronavirus”](#) webpage.

Influenza (flu) and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and flu is caused by infection with [influenza viruses](#).

COVID-19 seems to spread more easily than flu and causes more serious illness in some people. It can also take longer before people show symptoms and people can be contagious for longer. Because some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone, and [testing](#) may be needed to help confirm a diagnosis.



How COVID-19 Spreads

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “How COVID-19 Spreads” webpage.

COVID-19 spreads very easily from person to person.

COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through close contact from person to person, including between people who are physically near each other (within about 6 feet). People who are infected but do not show symptoms can also spread the virus to others. Cases of reinfection with COVID-19 have been reported but are rare. We are still learning about how the virus spreads and the severity of illness it causes.

How easily a virus spreads from person to person can vary. The virus that causes COVID-19 appears to spread more efficiently than influenza but not as efficiently as measles, which is among the most contagious viruses known to affect people.

COVID-19 most commonly spreads during close contact.

- People who are physically near (within 6 feet) a person with COVID-19 or have direct contact with that person are at greatest risk of infection.
- When people with COVID-19 cough, sneeze, sing, talk, or breathe they produce respiratory droplets. These droplets can range in size from larger droplets (some of which are visible) to smaller droplets. Small droplets can also form particles when they dry very quickly in the airstream.
- Infections occur mainly through exposure to respiratory droplets when a person is in close contact with someone who has COVID-19.
- Respiratory droplets cause infection when they are inhaled or deposited on mucous membranes, such as those that line the inside of the nose and mouth.
- As the respiratory droplets travel further from the person with COVID-19, the concentration of these droplets decreases. Larger droplets fall out of the air due to gravity. Smaller droplets and particles spread apart in the air.
- With passing time, the amount of infectious virus in respiratory droplets also decreases.

COVID-19 can sometimes be spread by airborne transmission.

- Some infections can be spread by exposure to virus in small droplets and particles that can linger in the air for minutes to hours. These viruses may be able to infect people who are further than 6 feet away from the person who is infected or after that person has left the space.
- This kind of spread is referred to as airborne transmission and is an important way that infections like tuberculosis, measles, and chicken pox are spread.
- There is evidence that under certain conditions, people with COVID-19 seem to have infected others who were more than 6 feet away. These transmissions occurred within enclosed spaces that had inadequate ventilation. Sometimes the infected person was breathing heavily, for example while singing or exercising. Under these circumstances, scientists believe that the amount of infectious smaller droplet and particles produced by the people with COVID-19 became concentrated enough to spread the virus to other people. The people who were infected were in the same space during the same time or shortly after the person with COVID-19 had left.



- Available data indicate that it is much more common for the virus that causes COVID-19 to spread through close contact with a person who has COVID-19 than through airborne transmission.

COVID-19 spreads less commonly through contact with contaminated surfaces.

- Respiratory droplets can also land on surfaces and objects. It is possible that a person could get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Spread from touching surfaces is not thought to be a common way that COVID-19 spreads.

COVID-19 rarely spreads between people and animals.

- It appears that the virus that causes COVID-19 can spread from people to animals in some situations. CDC is aware of a small number of pets worldwide, including cats and dogs, reported to be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, mostly after close contact with people with COVID-19. Learn what you should do [if you have pets](#).
- At this time, the risk of COVID-19 spreading from animals to people is considered to be low. Learn about [COVID-19 and pets and other animals](#).

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “How COVID-19 Spreads” webpage.

- Stay at least 6 feet away from others, whenever possible. This is very important in preventing the spread of COVID-19.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others. This helps reduce the risk of spread both by close contact and by airborne transmission.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid crowded indoor spaces and ensure indoor spaces are properly ventilated by bringing in outdoor air as much as possible. In general, being outdoors and in spaces with good ventilation reduces the risk of exposure to infectious respiratory droplets.
- Stay home and isolate from others when sick.
- Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and take other steps to stop the spread at home.
- Get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you are eligible.

Pandemics can be stressful, especially when you are staying away from others. During this time, it’s important to [maintain social connections and care for your mental health](#). Learn more about what you can do to [protect yourself and others](#).

Precautions for People Experiencing Homelessness

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “People Experiencing Homelessness” webpage.





Many of the [recommendations to prevent COVID-19](#) above may be difficult for a person experiencing homelessness to do. Although it may not be possible to avoid certain crowded locations (such as shelters), people experiencing homelessness should:

- Try to avoid other crowded public settings.
- If using public transportation, follow the CDC guidance on how to [protect yourself when using transportation](#), try to travel during less busy times, and clean your hands as soon as possible after their trip.
- If possible, use take-away options for food.
- Maintain a distance of 6 feet (about two arms' length) from other people.
- Wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as often as possible, and cover their coughs and sneezes.

Conclusion

Our understanding of COVID-19 is continuing to grow and, while we don't have all of the answers yet, a great deal is known about how COVID-19 is transmitted, its symptoms, risk factors, and steps that can be taken to prevent its spread. PEH may be at higher risk for severe illness associated with COVID-19 because of underlying health conditions and/or age. They face unique challenges to risk reduction in congregate shelters and encampments, and homeless advocates should provide honest information about COVID-19 risk and harm reduction strategies to help PEH prevent their risk of exposure to COVID-19.