Frequently Asked Questions WBG/IMF Contractors in Country Offices/Overseas Offices

This document has been produced to provide guidance to contracting staff working within Country Offices/Overseas Offices, in relation to the current COVID-19 situation.

Vaccinations

Should I get vaccinated against the flu this year?

Yes. Flu vaccination is recommended each year during flu season for everyone 6 months and older, with some rare exceptions. This year in particular, as COVID-19 causes symptoms that may be similar to the flu, it is especially important to follow these recommendations. This will help protect you against the flu and prevent potential avoidable visits to medical providers where you may be presumed to have COVID-19. Getting the flu vaccine will also help limit the impact on potentially scarce health care resources.

In the northern hemisphere, the flu season runs from October through March, and in the southern hemisphere it runs from April through September. In tropical and sub-tropical regions, flu may spread year-round. You should check with your doctor about getting the flu vaccine during flu season where you are living. In the U.S. and other northern hemisphere countries, the flu vaccine is usually available in October, but may be received in September if available. In southern hemisphere countries the flu vaccine is available in April.

In CO locations: check with your medical provider about where you can get the vaccine.

Should I get a pneumococcal vaccine or vaccines against any other diseases?

While COVID-19 is known to cause atypical pneumonia in some patients with moderate to severe illness, existing pneumococcal vaccines do not prevent this type of pneumonia. Pneumococcal vaccines protect against pneumonia caused by Streptococcus pneumoniae bacteria, which is only one of several causes of pneumonia. Typically, children younger than 2 years old and adults age 65 and older get vaccinated against pneumonia. Some adults with underlying chronic health problems or who are smokers may also receive the pneumococcal vaccine, if recommended by their doctor. You should check with your doctor if you fall into one of these categories.

It is always important to receive standard recommended vaccinations according to your country’s vaccination schedule. If you think you have missed vaccines for diseases such as measles, polio, tetanus, meningitis, or hepatitis A or B, or others, talk to your doctor about getting vaccinated. These are important tools in preventing illness.

Masks & Cloth Face Coverings

Updated Feb 25: When should I use a facemask and which type?

The WHO, U.S. CDC, and other national health authorities recommend wearing masks to prevent transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19. Proper use of face
masks can help prevent the spread of COVID-19. A significant amount of COVID-19 transmission occurs when people have no symptoms. Face masks limit the droplets and aerosol particles being exhaled into the environment from someone potentially infected. When properly worn, a mask also protects the person wearing it from others' respiratory droplets and aerosols.

NOTE (Jan 2021): Health authorities in some countries have either required or recommended medical grade masks or layering masks for better filtration. Where recommended or required by local authorities, staff should follow those guidelines. The reason for these recent recommendations is due to the apparent higher transmissibility of new COVID-19 variants combined with the high number of cases present in locations making those recommendations. The U.S. CDC has NOT changed its recommendation on masks and recommends that people wear non-medical masks (whether disposable or cloth), and that if made of cloth, they should be at least 2 layers thick. Most disposable non-medical masks are made of at least 3 layers of non-woven material.

HSD reminds staff that protection provided by a mask depends on both filtration and fit. While medical grade N95 masks may provide a higher filtration, they will not provide improved protection if they do not fit well.

Tips on Fit:

To be effective, a mask must be worn over the mouth and nose.

If you have a mask with a nose wire, mold the wire to your nose bridge to close gaps.

Improve the fit of a disposable mask and eliminate the side gap by knotting the ear loops near the mask and tucking in the side of the mask for a close fit.

Two ways to check for fit:

- Exhale while feeling for airflow out the sides, top, & bottom of the mask with your hands.
- When you inhale, the mask should collapse toward your face, indicating no air being pulled in through the edges of the mask.

Tips on Filtration:

A mask should be at least 2 layers thick

- Disposable masks are often made with 3-5 layers of fused material
- Cloth masks should be made with at least 2 layers of tightly woven breathable material. Check this by seeing if the fabric blocks light when held up to a bright light.

When using a face covering or mask of any kind, it is essential to also use other measures to prevent spread of disease, avoiding the “3 Cs”:
• **Close contact** with others (stay at least 2 meters/6 feet away from others who are not in your household),

• **Crowded places**, and

• **Closed spaces** with poor ventilation.

Also remember to avoid touching your face and wash your hands frequently with soap and water.

**Cloth and disposable masks**

**Use**: For the general public when outside the home, especially when undertaking activities where a distance of 2 meters/6 feet or more from others cannot always be maintained, such as when using public transport, in shops, or in other confined or crowded environments. They should also be used when caring for someone sick with COVID-19 in your home, or by someone who is sick with COVID-19 and is being cared for by family or household members.

**Purpose**: To help prevent spread of infection from you to others, and from others to you. Because a significant amount of transmission occurs when people do not (yet) have symptoms, it is important to wear a mask anytime outside your household.


**Specifications**: There are many different varieties of cloth and disposable masks. They should cover the nose and mouth and fit well without gaps. You should feel no air flow through or out the sides, top, or bottom of the mask. Cloth masks should be at least 2 layers to be effective, should not be "see through", and should have ear straps or head straps / ties in order to ensure a good fit.

**Medical masks / N95 respirators**

**Use**: For healthcare workers caring for patients ill with COVID-19.

**Purpose**: To protect themselves from illness transmitted by sick patient. N95 masks require specific training and fit testing to be used effectively and should be reserved for healthcare workers.

Some national and local health authorities require people to wear face coverings or masks in public places and may enforce this. You should follow local requirements in such locations.

**COVID-19 Testing**

For those living outside the U.S., in general, testing is under the control of local health authorities and may require a doctor’s referral. Individuals should consult with their doctor in that location. As testing needs to be conducted as part of a local medical strategy and support infrastructure, COs are encouraged to coordinate with UN Country Teams who are developing
local solutions as part of the UN First Line of Defense initiative (FLOD), in partnership with UN and ILO clinics where present.

**Can I be tested to see if I have had COVID-19 and am immune?**

Tests for past infection with COVID-19 (called antibody tests or serology tests) are very new and many of them have not been validated for accuracy. Any use of these tests needs to be approached with caution right now, as they do not offer clear results. Even those tests which are validated may have a high rate of false positive or false negative results, meaning they cannot accurately tell you if you were infected with COVID-19 in the past.

Doctors and researchers also do not know whether having antibodies against COVID-19 provides protection against future infection, and if so, for how long. This will take time and research to determine. These kinds of tests therefore, which may be useful for epidemiological research, are not able to determine your immunity status, nor will it help at this time in making decisions on return to the office or workplace assignment.

**I am Sick**

**What should I do if I have COVID-19?**

Stay home and away from others. Your actions make a difference in limiting the spread of illness. Get rest and stay hydrated. Talk to your doctor to discuss your symptoms and to see whether you should be tested or need specific treatment.

Use good hygiene to prevent spreading your illness to others. Isolate yourself from other members of your household to the degree possible, sleeping in a separate bedroom and using a separate bathroom if available. Wear a mask around other household members and maintain at least a 2 meter/6 foot distance. Have your household members wear a mask any time they may need to be around you as well. Limit the time you spend in any common areas or around others in your home, even when maintaining physical distance and masking. Clean any high touch surfaces frequently.

If you or any household member that is ill has severe symptoms of illness, including emergency warning signs for COVID-19 such as trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in your chest, bluish lips or face, or new confusion or difficulty being woken, seek emergency medical care right away.

If symptoms of illness are not severe, but you need to seek medical care:

- Contact your healthcare provider by phone.
- If you need a healthcare provider, see "Finding a Healthcare Provider / COVID-19 Testing."
- If you must go out to receive medical care, wear a mask.
When can I be around others or return to the office after being diagnosed or ill with COVID-19?

People (who are not immunocompromised*) who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 can be around others / return to the office when:

- **If they were ill with symptoms**: A minimum of 10 days has passed since the first symptoms of illness, plus another 3 days after the end of respiratory symptoms and fever (other symptoms such as fatigue or lack of ability to smell may last longer and do not indicate infectiousness to others).

- **If they were asymptomatic**: A minimum of 10 days after testing positive.

*If you are immunocompromised, confirm with your doctor when it is safe to be around others.

It is not necessary to be retested for COVID-19 if meeting the above criteria.

**Reminder**: Anyone who has been in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 should quarantine for 14 days after the last contact with the individual. In the case of family/household contacts of ill individuals, those non-ill individuals should quarantine for 14 days after their household contact is no longer infectious per the above parameters.

**About COVID-19**

**How does COVID-19 spread?**

COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person through respiratory particles that are exhaled when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, sings, or breathes. This happens most directly when someone is in close contact with an infected person (within 2 meters/6 feet). But in some cases, it may happen at further distances with particles that are airborne (see question below on what is known about aerosol/airborne transmission). It is important to be aware that the virus can be spread by people that have NO symptoms. In a recent study published by JAMA (The Journal of the American Medical Association), over 50% of transmission of COVID-19 may be from individuals who are asymptomatic (either pre-symptomatic or who never develop symptoms).

The virus may spread by touching surfaces where respiratory droplets from infected people have landed, but this is more likely to happen in locations such as medical facilities or when taking care of a COVID-19 patient at home. If you touch a surface and then touch your nose, mouth or eyes without washing your hands, you may infect yourself. Therefore, it is important to not touch your face, and to wash your hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with soap and water after you have been in a public place or if you have been around someone who is sick.

Since COVID-19 can be spread by people who have no symptoms, it is important to wear a mask or face covering whenever you leave home or when interacting with anyone outside your household.
Can I get COVID-19 through aerosol/airborne transmission?

The degree to which SARS CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) can be spread through airborne transmission is an evolving area of scientific study. (There is a spectrum of respiratory droplets from larger to smaller. Smaller respiratory droplets may be carried in the air further and for a longer period of time than heavier droplets which tend to fall to the ground within 2 meters/6 feet of an individual.)

There have been certain documented circumstances where the virus is thought to have spread through airborne transmission. However, most infections are thought to be tied to closer and direct contact with infected individuals. The cases where airborne transmission have caused infections were in enclosed areas with inadequate ventilation, and in some cases involved groups of people talking loudly or singing – essentially in circumstances where these respiratory particles remained concentrated enough to cause infection.

The best protection against any transmission of SARS CoV-2 remains proper distancing of at least 2 meters/6 feet from others who are not part of your household, wearing a mask or face covering when leaving home, and following these guidelines:

- Avoid the "3 Cs": crowded places, close contact settings, confined and enclosed spaces such as bars, restaurants, places of worship, gyms, waiting rooms, etc.
- Outdoors is better than indoors.
- Fresh air/open windows are safer than recirculated air.
- Proper filtration in ventilation systems is important.
- In indoor environments, spacing, number of people, and type of activities can affect the risk level (i.e. gyms where people are breathing heavily are riskier than an office where proper distancing is maintained).

What are the symptoms?

- Fever (38.0 C/100.4 F or higher)
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell
Other symptoms such as diarrhea or nasal congestion may also be present. Symptoms may be mild to severe and can appear from 1 to 14 days after exposure. If you or anyone you know experiences any of the following signs or symptoms while infected with COVID-19, seek emergency medical care right away: trouble breathing, persistent chest pressure or pain, new confusion, inability to stay awake, bluish lips or face.

How do I prevent myself and others from becoming infected?

- Maintain physical distance of at least 2 meters/6 feet from all individuals who are not part of your household.
- Wear a mask or face covering outside of your home when you may encounter other non-household members (outdoors and indoors). A mask should be worn in any indoor setting where there are others around, EVEN IF maintaining a 2 meter/6 foot distance.
- Avoid crowded areas, close contact settings, and confined or enclosed spaces with poor air circulation. Do not host or participate in any large gatherings.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds, especially when returning from any public setting, before eating, and before touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. If no soap is available use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- When coughing and sneezing, do NOT remove your mask (if you are outside of your home).
- If you are exposed to someone known or suspected to have COVID-19, you should self-quarantine for 14 days after the last known contact and monitor your health for symptoms of COVID-19. This self-quarantine period should include limiting contact with other household members (sleeping in a separate bedroom, if possible, and wearing a mask around others in your household).
- If you were in a situation with high risk of COVID-19 transmission (such as a large gathering), monitor yourself for 14 days to see if you develop symptoms and follow distancing and masking precautions. If the gathering you attended has confirmed COVID-19 cases, discuss with your doctor whether you were exposed and whether you need to quarantine for 14 days and be tested.

Practice prudent social distancing measures:

- Avoid visiting elderly relatives if possible. People over 65 are at greater risk of severe disease. Minimize exposure of elderly relatives to additional people. If you must visit, wear a mask, practice good hygiene and do not take your children. Connect virtually using your phones/computers.
- Have your children practice social distancing. Minimize/stop playdates, and if playing at the park, maintain at least 2 meters/6 feet from other children. Cases in children can be asymptomatic, and you may not know if your child or someone else’s child has COVID-19.
• If restaurants are open, do not dine in. Get takeout and when you get home, remove the packaging and throw it away. Wash your hands thoroughly again before eating.

• Do not visit friends/throw private parties or host gatherings. Rather consider going for a walk with individual friends (keeping 2 meters/6 feet apart) in the open air. This reduces the risk of transmission between adults.

• Go shopping only for essential items. Visit the grocery store at off-peak periods or when it is quieter.

• Minimize use of public transportation if you can. If you need to use public transportation, use during off-peak times. Avoid being in cars/buses with lots of people. If you are able, use a private car.

I am not Sick

What should I do if I have had close contact with a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case?

If you know that have you been in close contact* with someone confirmed to have COVID-19, or who was declared a probable case, you should self-quarantine (stay at home) and avoid contact with others for a period of 14 days from the last known contact with the ill person. If you develop symptoms or are tested for COVID-19, contact HSD. Your confidentiality will be respected.

If living with someone who is sick with COVID-19, do not go to work and avoid contact with others. Follow instructions for minimizing your exposure outlined by the U.S. CDC. Local public health authorities should give you guidance on when you will be able to end your self-isolation.

*While data to precisely define "close contact" is limited, the U.S. CDC has updated its definition to mean being within 2 meters/6 feet of an infected individual for 15 cumulative minutes over a 24 hour period (this may include multiple short contacts that add up to 15 minutes). This expansion of the definition (from 15 consecutive minutes of contact) is based on new data, meaning that multiple short contacts that add up to 15 minutes or more may pose a risk for transmission.

What if I have a chronic medical condition and may be at a higher risk for illness from COVID-19?

Certain individuals are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. That includes older adults (risk increases with age) and those with certain medical conditions:

• Cancer;
• Chronic kidney disease;
• Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD);
• Serious heart conditions (such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies);
• People who are immunocompromised from blood, bone marrow or solid organ transplants; immunodeficiencies; HIV with a low CD4 count (an indicator of immune function in patients living with HIV) or not on HIV treatment; prolonged use of corticosteroids; or use of other immune weakening medicines;

• Obesity (BMI of 30 or higher) or severe obesity (BMI of 40 or higher);

• Pregnancy;

• Sickle cell disease;

• Smoking;

• Type 2 diabetes.

There are certain other medical conditions that may increase the risk of severe illness, but data are still limited. These conditions include asthma, high blood pressure, chronic liver disease, type 1 diabetes, and other conditions. See the full list here.

For those who are at higher risk, ensure that you have enough of any prescription medications you take, and strictly follow social distancing and masking guidelines. Stay in touch with your doctor to ensure that your underlying medical condition is closely monitored. If you get sick, do not delay in seeking medical care.

Staying at Home

Can I safely gather with my family or community for celebrations or other events?

Everyone has a role to play in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and a responsibility to protect others in their family and community, particularly the most vulnerable. Any meeting/gathering of people should be undertaken only if permitted by local authorities and when there is no ongoing spread of COVID-19 in your community. Anyone who does not live in the same house as you poses a potential risk, even if they are family members. Remember that if you are exposed to someone who then develops COVID-19, you are at risk of developing COVID-19 and will need to go into quarantine (isolate yourself from all others for 14 days).

We do not recommend gathering with family members or friends who do not live in the same house. If you choose to participate in a larger gathering, please read the General Guidance for Gatherings of Families or Communities and maintain a 2-meter/6-foot distance from one another.

If you or any of the participants in a gathering become ill with symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath, tiredness, aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea) after the gathering, anyone who was in contact with or around that person in the 2 days before symptoms started needs to self-quarantine for a period of 14 days from their last contact with that person.

For information on how to limit the spread of COVID-19, please review guidance from the WHO and the U.S. CDC. For U.S. CDC advice related to specific holidays, please click here.
Can I safely travel to gather with my family or community for celebrations or other events?

We do not recommend gathering with family members or friends who do not live in the same house. If you choose to travel during holidays or vacation, maintain a 2-meter/6-foot distance from one another.

For those traveling to Washington, DC, from areas outside the DMV (District, Maryland, Virginia area) or from Washington, DC, to other locations and then returning, please read the guidance on the [D.C. Department of Health website](https://doh.dc.gov/) regarding testing and quarantine requirements.

If you choose to travel, consider your mode of travel and its relative safety. Traveling in your own vehicle with limited stops and avoiding crowded areas when stopping for food or restroom breaks is safest. See [CDC guidance on travel safety](https://www.cdc.gov/travel) and considerations for different modes of travel.

Are there specific testing requirements before traveling?

Many countries require a negative COVID-19 test for entry. The [U.S. CDC has announced](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/traveler/requirements.html) that all passengers traveling to the U.S. from overseas must show a negative viral test done no more than 3 days before their flight (effective from January 26, 2021). For those who were recently ill with COVID-19, they must show documentation of recovery: a copy of previous positive viral test results and a letter from their healthcare provider or a public health official that states they have been cleared for travel or cleared to end isolation.

You should check the testing requirements before travel with the health authorities of the destination country or location. Here is one location where you can find international travel restrictions: [IATA Travel Regulations Map](https://www.iata.org).  

What do I do when at home and avoiding contact with others?

- Limit outings to essential activities.
- Practice good hygiene within the home (in addition to when going out), to limit potential spread of illness to those in your household.
- If someone in your household is ill, follow guidelines for caring for someone sick at home.
- Reduce boredom during self-isolation by trying to keep up a normal daily routine as far as possible.

What practical steps can I take to address my anxiety about this situation?

It is natural to worry about things that might happen in the future. A practical step you can take is to consider your current health needs and how you can best protect your health and that of your family. Ensure that you have an adequate supply of any prescription medications you or your family members need, know where to go to seek medical care, practice good hygiene such as washing hands frequently, use good cough etiquette, and avoid touching your face, particularly when out in public and if you or family members are sick. It is also good practice to always have a personal/family emergency plan and review this regularly, as well as having
a home emergency kit in place that includes food and water that can be stored in the event of an inability to go out from your home for a period of time.