

What you need to know about the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

What is the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19)?

Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. At this time, it's unclear how easily the virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading between people.

Current Risk Assessment from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention

- For the general American public, who are unlikely to be exposed to this virus at this time, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low.
- People in communities where ongoing community spread with the virus that causes COVID-19 has been reported are at elevated though still relatively low risk of exposure.
- Healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19 are at elevated risk of exposure.
- Close contacts of persons with COVID-19 also are at elevated risk of exposure.
- Travelers returning from affected international locations where community spread is occurring also are at elevated risk of exposure.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Most people who contract COVID-19 will have mild symptoms, but some people will have more severe symptoms. Symptoms can include fever, cough and difficulty breathing (shortness of breath).

What does COVID-19 mean for people living with MS?

Many disease modifying therapies (DMTs) for MS work by modifying or suppressing the immune system. People with MS are treated with these therapies can face an increased risk of infections.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are following the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19), which causes a respiratory disease. This is a rapidly evolving situation and questions regarding the use of MS disease modifying therapies during this outbreak are being raised.

The National MS Society's National Medical Advisory Committee recommends the following:

1. People with MS should follow CDC guidelines and these additional recommendations for people at risk for serious illnesses from COVID-19.
2. People with MS should continue disease modifying therapies (DMTs) and discuss specific risks with their MS healthcare provider prior to stopping a DMT.
3. Before starting a cell depleting DMT* or a DMT that carries warnings of potentially severe increase in disability after stopping**, people with MS and their MS healthcare providers should consider specific risks (e.g. age, comorbid health conditions, location) and benefits.
4. If you have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or believe you have otherwise been exposed to COVID-19 or are confirmed to have this infection, stay home and contact your MS and primary care providers for advice right away.
5. Call your MS and primary care provider if you have recently traveled from an area with widespread or ongoing community spread of COVID-19.

These recommendations are the expert opinion of the National Medical Advisory Committee and are based on their clinical experience and assessment of the limited data available regarding COVID-19 and MS DMTs. They have been endorsed by the Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers (CMSC) and members of the MS Coalition. We are continuing to monitor this quickly evolving situation and these recommendations may be modified as more data becomes available.

* Cell depleting therapies include: Lemtrada, Mavenclad, Ocrevus and Rituxan (used off-label in MS)

** DMTs with a warning of potentially severe increase in disability after stopping include: Gilenya and Tysabri

How can I help protect myself and others?

There are simple everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses. These include:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid close contact (at least 3 feet away) with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a flexed elbow or tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Stay home and contact your primary care provider if you develop symptoms, have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19, or if you have recently traveled from an area with widespread or ongoing community spread of COVID-19.

Resources: [https://www.nationalmssociety.org/What-you-need-to-know-about-Coronavirus-\(COVID-19\)](https://www.nationalmssociety.org/What-you-need-to-know-about-Coronavirus-(COVID-19))