



Fighting COVID-19 On the Road: Precautions & What to Do If You Experience Symptoms

In order to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus, people across the nation have been advised to stay at home and to practice social distancing, with some states putting the force of law behind those orders. However, there are rare times when people need to be on the road. Some will hop into their RV or onto their motorcycle to travel to provide critical care for family members. Others are truckers performing essential work as they provide hospitals with medical supplies and keep grocery stores stocked with food and other necessities.

Grappling with the coronavirus pandemic can be stressful enough when at home, but what if you start to experience coronavirus symptoms while on the road? To protect yourself, those who may be traveling with you, and those you may come into contact with during and after a trip, it is vitally important that you are familiar with proper precautions to take while on the road, how to identify symptoms of COVID-19, and what to do if you get sick away from home.

COVID-19 Precautions On the Road

There are a number of steps that we can all take to protect against coronavirus, as well as specific steps those on the road should plan and implement. Generally, the CDC recommends:

- To avoid contact with the virus
 - Maintain six feet of social distance from other people
 - Avoid touching your face
- To kill the virus:
 - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
 - If soap and water is unavailable, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- To protect others
 - Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
 - Stay at home/self-isolate if you feel unwell

Those federal recommendations are a solid foundation for reducing the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and in our country, but if you are going to be on the road during this pandemic, there are additional actions you can take to defend against the coronavirus. **First, plan out your trip in detail -- before departing -- so that you are prepared for any circumstances you may encounter.**

Begin by mapping out the roads and highways you'll be traveling, taking note of the states and localities the route will take you through. Then, be sure to check those areas for any relevant travel advisories or restrictions, and/or temporary changes to policies like toll collection and food sales. So far the federal government has largely left these decisions to state and local governments, which means you'll need to give yourself time to do the research into each region.

Food services is one area to look for in particular, as many states have suspended dine-in services and have limited restaurants to drive-through, delivery, and take-out options only. You'll therefore need a plan for meals, whether it's taking along all of your own food or looking up which spots along your route are still open and serving to-go food.

Perhaps most importantly, you need to plan now for the chance that you get sick while on the road, including planning for both mild and severe symptoms, and planning for being close to or far away from home. If your symptoms are mild enough that you can still safely operate your vehicle, what is the maximum distance where you could still turn around and return home without interacting with and endangering others? If you are far from home, where will you be able to shelter in place and quarantine yourself? If your symptoms are severe, do you have contact information for the local hospital or health department so that you can receive the best medical direction and care?

Again, you need to know the answers to these questions **before** you depart. For truckers, you'll need to work with your fleet manager to settle these issues, as well as come up with a potential plan for your stranded load if you get sick.

Specifically, it will be important to research in advance what the COVID-19 outbreak is like in the region through which you will be traveling, as well as the status of the medical services in the area. If the healthcare system in that location is already being pushed close to or beyond capacity, it could be difficult to receive adequate and timely care -- certainly something you'll want to know beforehand.

Researching hotel openings is also part of planning for the potential of getting sick away from home, in case you need to find a place to quarantine with mild symptoms. This is important even for RVers and truckers who often have sleeping accommodations in their vehicle, as those set-ups may not be sufficient if you become more seriously sick. Many major chain hotels along highways not only remain open, but have additionally loosened their cancellation policies, while other hotels are actually offering reduced-rate [14-day quarantine packages](#).

Planning out your trip is an essential step in taking precautions against coronavirus. **Second, take along supplies** that you may need during the pandemic. To travel during COVID-19, you should make sure that you have a working thermometer in order to regularly check your temperature, as well as sufficient cleaning supplies to keep your vehicle sanitized. These provisions may include disposable gloves, disinfectant wipes, and sealable disposable bags. For your own health, you should also pack hand sanitizer, tissues, and extra medication.

It's additionally a good idea to bring along your own food in order to compensate for restaurant closings and limitations, further decrease your interpersonal contact, and be prepared in case you contract coronavirus and need to self-isolate away from home. Some RVs and semi-trucks are equipped with cooking equipment, while other drivers will have to pre-make food.

Once you have planned your trip and stocked up on supplies, you're ready to hit the road. **Third, take precautionary actions while on the road**. Once in your vehicle, use those cleaning supplies to [regularly sanitize](#) your door handles and controls, keys or start button, steering wheel, gear shift, seats, dash buttons and knobs, sun visor, anything touchscreen, the console, and cup-holders.

When stopping at a gas station, pay with a credit or debit card as much as possible, which can then be cleaned after use. It is recommended that you wear gloves when touching the touchpad and pump, and then immediately dispose of them. If gloves are not available, use paper towels to guard your hand. You can also use paper towels to avoid touching the faucet or door handles in rest-stop bathrooms, as directly touching those commonly-touched, dirty surfaces defeats the purpose of washing your hands. No matter what you do at the gas station, it is critically important that you sanitize your hands after you are done and before you get back into your vehicle.

If you do have to stay in a hotel for whatever reason, you need to be especially vigilant about cleaning and/or avoiding any and all surfaces commonly touched by other guests or hotel staff, including the toilet, bathroom sink, TV remotes, telephones, bedside lamp switches, bedspreads, and pillows.

Finally, one of the best steps you can take to defend yourself against coronavirus is to keep yourself healthy while traveling. Support [your immune system](#) with sufficient sleep, healthy eating, staying hydrated, regular exercise, and stress management.

Following these precautionary guidelines can help you avoid COVID-19 while traveling. However, despite your best efforts, there is still a chance you contract the coronavirus. If you get sick while on the road, you need to be able to recognize the symptoms of COVID-19 and know how to respond.

Identifying COVID-19 Symptoms

According to the CDC, the most common [symptoms of coronavirus](#) are:

- **Fever**
- **Tiredness**
- **Dry cough**

Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. However, for some (20%), the disease can require serious care and can even be fatal. This is especially true for older people and those with other medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease.

Severe symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- **Difficulty breathing**
- **Persistent chest pain or pressure**
- **Confusion or an inability to be aroused**
- **Blue-ish lips or face**

Keep in mind that people may be sick with the virus for 1 to 14 days before developing symptoms, which is why we are all social-distancing right now -- you can never know who may already have the disease.

What to Do if You Experience COVID-19 Symptoms On the Road

First things first, if you are feeling unwell before you depart, even with mild conditions like a runny nose, ***do not travel -- stay at home.***

CDC guidelines recommend that if you have mild coronavirus symptoms (fever, tiredness, dry cough), you should **call your primary care doctor, the local health department, or the nearest emergency room.** Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to determine if you need to be tested for COVID-19 and to quickly direct you to the right health facility for testing and/or treatment. This process protects you and helps prevent the spread of the virus in your community. Some health insurance providers also provide telemedicine benefits which can be a source of supplemental medical advice for truckers on the road.

The most likely course of action for those with mild symptoms will be to self-isolate. However, if you develop emergency warning signs for coronavirus (trouble breathing, chest pain or pressure, confusion,

blue-ish facial features), you need to seek **immediate medical attention**. If you call 911, notify the operator that you think you may have COVID-19. If possible, put on a facemask (or cover your mouth with a scarf or bandana) before medical help arrives. Additionally, you should immediately consult your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.

You should also keep in mind that, in very rare cases, it is possible for a coronavirus test to be wrong. If you test negative, but are experiencing the symptoms of COVID-19, then -- for the safety of yourself and others -- you should follow all the safety procedures of self-isolation as you would if the test had come back positive.

If you are able to self-isolate at home, **keep as much distance from others as possible** by staying in one designated “sick room” and using a separate bathroom if available. Even if keeping to yourself, others who live in the home will need to self-isolate too, even if they don’t have symptoms (after interacting with you or surfaces you have touched, they could be an asymptomatic carrier). When symptomatic, you should also wear a facemask or fashion one out of a scarf or bandana.

If you are on the road when you develop coronavirus symptoms, you’ll need to contact the local health department or local hospital for guidance (if your symptoms are severe, call 911). If you are not directed to immediately seek medical help, and instead are told to self isolate, one possibility will be returning home. Quarantine at home is certainly more comfortable, but only drive yourself home if you can do so safely and without coming into contact with others and spreading the virus.

When you are too far away or too sick to get yourself home, you may be able to have a friend or family member pick you up (however, you should both be aware that they will be putting themselves at risk of contracting this serious illness). In this instance, it is likely best to find a place to self-isolate in your current location until you are well, or well-enough to make it home to continue your quarantine. Again, rely on the advice of medical professionals when you call the health department or hospital.

Some drivers, like RVers and truckers with sleeper cabs, may be able to self-isolate right in their vehicle. If your best option is to stay in a hotel, follow the advice we already outlined above, cleaning and/or avoiding any and all surfaces commonly touched by other guests or hotel staff. It is also **absolutely necessary** that you call ahead to the hotel and be **completely up-front** with them that you will be staying in their establishment to quarantine yourself because you have COVID-19. This allows them to decide if they are willing to accept the risk of your stay and, if they do allow you to stay at the hotel, to warn their staff against entering your room during your stay and to prepare for the intensive cleaning that will have to take place after you check-out.

When truckers get sick on the road, [the fleet should](#) (1) **work with the driver** to ensure they get the best care possible and get home as soon as possible without further interaction with other people or the cargo, (2) figure out what to do with stranded trucks or loads, including retrieving the load and determining how to disinfect and/or isolate the cargo in accordance with CDC guidelines, and (3) **notify anyone with whom the driver may have come into contact** that they may have had exposure to COVID-19, including employees at shipping and receiving sites (note that medical history is protected by federal privacy law, so fleets cannot specify the driver’s name). Similarly, any other fleet employee who interacted with the driver, like terminal workers, will need to be tested or quarantined as well.

According to the CDC, those with coronavirus can discontinue isolation when **ALL THREE** of the following criteria are satisfied:

- You have had no fever for at least 72 hours (that is three full days of no fever without the use of medicine that reduces fevers), AND
- other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough or shortness of breath have improved), AND
- at least 7 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared.

Conclusion

This is an unprecedented time in our nation, and an unprecedented time to be on the road. While you may enjoy somewhat lighter highway traffic over the next few weeks and months, the safety of yourself, those you know, and those in your community is the top priority. With that responsibility in mind, it is vitally important that those who do not need to travel stay at home, and those who must get on the road take precautions against COVID-19, be able to identify the symptoms of coronavirus, and know what to do if you get sick. We're all in this together and can keep each other safe if we follow the recommended guidelines from medical professionals. And to the truckers who are putting themselves at risk to keep our country running during this pandemic, you have the heartfelt thanks of a grateful nation.

For more resources directly related to COVID-19, [visit the CDC's coronavirus webpage](#).

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