

WHAT'S SAFE AND WHAT'S NOT DURING THE PANDEMIC

Doctor answers questions about coronavirus safety

By Jessica Roy and Mark Potts
Los Angeles Times

What's safe and what isn't these days?

With coronavirus, it's hard to know. But an expert on viruses has some insights. We posed a selection of burning questions from our readers to Paula Cannon, a professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California.

Is it safe to have my windows open? Is it safe to get takeout or delivery? Do I need to disinfect all my groceries? Is it safe to have sex with my partner or with a person I met on Tinder? Where should I be wearing masks or gloves? Should I be gargling hydrogen peroxide or taking colloidal silver to fight the virus? What kind of face covering is best, and when should I be wearing one?

Some of the answers to your most frequently asked coronavirus questions are below, where they have been lightly edited and condensed for clarity.

• Can you still have sex during this pandemic? Does it help if you don't kiss?

Will having sex with somebody who's infected with coronavirus put you at risk of getting coronavirus? Hell, yes. Whether you kiss or not. Just being up close to somebody else will. So it won't put you at massively more risk than just sharing a bed with them or breathing in the same space or being in the same household. So I guess I don't want to sound like your mother, but it's probably not a good time to be identifying people on an app and having hookups, because even just having dinner with somebody you don't know who's not wearing a mask is putting you at a slight risk.

But the extra risk that sex would introduce if you're already sharing a house with somebody, zero. Go for it. I mean literally go for it.

• It sounds like it's OK if you're quarantining together, you're not more likely to get sicker from your partner, but it's not a good time to be Tindering.

Right. Again, I don't want to sound judgey, but yeah, hold it in, people.

• If I have multiple essential trips to make — like going to the grocery store and the post office — is it better to do them all in one trip



Mario Tama/Getty Images-TNS

It's hard to know what's safe and what isn't these days amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

or to spread them out over multiple trips?

I would say it depends what type of person you are. Because going out of your house, going into spaces where other people are, the grocery store, the post office, and then coming back home, does require a (decontamination) routine. If you can do the routine well, you have my permission to go to multiple places.

But the way you should be approaching this is, every time you go into a post office or grocery store, you're at small risk (of getting sick), but you're putting other people at risk. When you come out of that space, you need to think about decontaminating yourself before you either get back into your car or go into another place.

There's some simple things you can do. For example, if I go to the grocery store, I get back to my car, the first thing I'm doing is I get the Purell on; I'm thinking about how to keep my car safe. So then I can go out and go into another store.

If that's challenging for you, if working and behaving in this really weird different way we have to do is stressful and difficult, then I would say just do one trip (at a time). If that's enough for you and your level of anxiety, that's fine as well.

So you can do either. It really comes down to personality type.

• If I have no symptoms and I'm at home and I've washed my hands, can I pick my nose?

Quite frankly, if you have no symptoms — or even if you do have symptoms — and

you need to pick your nose, go ahead and do it. Because the only person you're going to be infecting is yourself. Once you're infected, you can't get more infected (from yourself).

What I would tell you not to do is not to be touching your nose, your mouth, everything, and then think of it — if you're infected you'll have infected hands, and you have to think about what you're doing with those.

So again, if you're in your own home, not a problem. You're either by yourself or quarantining with people you've agreed to share viruses with. But if you're going out, maybe don't be doing that and then opening a door handle. And this is not just about coronavirus, people. This is how normal people should be behaving anyway.

• Can you kill the virus if it's in your throat and you gargle hydrogen peroxide?

No. You can't, because the virus isn't just one group of viruses hanging in your throat at any one time and then you can kill them. Viruses, if you're infected, are constantly being produced, constantly shedding; they're in your secretions, they're replicating themselves. They're evil little bastards. Sure, maybe on some small local level you can kill some population of viruses, but they're gonna get replaced instantly. Literally you'd have to be gargling hydrogen peroxide 24 hours a day.

• There are a lot of mask patterns out there. Is there one that's the best kind of face covering, or is there one that's so bad that it's worse than not wearing one at all?

No. I think there's a lot of

guidance online and people can be creative. I have friends who are fantastic sewers and they're making very complicated designs with multiple pieces that stick out and everything. Honestly, my favorite designs are to take a T-shirt and wrap it around your head a few times and make holes in it that go over your ears and tie it at the back.

I think the important components of an effective face mask are, No. 1, can you breathe? Is it comfortable for you to wear? Because if you can't breathe easily, or it gets wet and it's uncomfortable, you're going to be fiddling with it, and you're going to be doing the very thing we want the mask to stop you from doing, which is touching your face. So have something that's comfortable.

Secondly, multiple layers are going to help. People take two to three layers, people put linings and things, they've taken things out of vacuum cleaner bags, they've taken some sort of stuffing, anything you know yourself is going to reduce things passing through can help.

You don't want to be wearing something that's like a plague doctor on the front of your face, because that's kind of awkward. But have something that's comfortable, doesn't inhibit you breathing, and stays on. But it can be something as simple as a couple of bandanas wrapped around and tied jauntily at the back. That would actually work very well.

Social distancing advice

Mayo Clinic News Network

Countries, states and cities are encouraging people to stay home and practice social distancing by implementing various restrictions to help curb the spread of COVID-19. Some areas have implemented certain restrictions, such as stay-at-home orders. The rules vary in different areas, which is why Dr. Nipunie Rajapakse, an infectious diseases expert, says it's important that people are familiar with what the rules are where they live.

"Some of the general principles are to limit movements outside of your home

to only those activities which are completely essential. These are things like seeking medical care, getting groceries that are essential, picking up medications from a pharmacy or reporting to work if you work in one of the essential health care sectors or other in-

dustries," says Dr. Rajapakse. When going out in public, Rajapakse says it's especially important to practice social distancing, which is keeping a 6-foot radius between you and other people.

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