

## MAINTAINING SOCIAL DISTANCING WHILE STROLLING



Dreamstime / TNS

Sidewalk etiquette is especially important while social distancing is recommended.

# The sidewalk shuffle

■ Walking is a good way to stay fit, but be prepared to step aside for others

By Rachel Hutton  
Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

MINNEAPOLIS — Abigail Johnson has spent most of her adulthood car-free, living in New York for nearly a decade and then in Uptown Minneapolis for the past two years.

As chair of the city's Pedestrian Advisory Committee, she has been encouraged by how many other walkers she's been encountering during the pandemic.

"I'm hoping it leads to people realizing that walking is just such a wonderful way to do a lot of daily activities," Johnson said. "People are slowly realizing how good walking is for your mental and physical health. You're combining all these wonderful aspects of being with your community, in your community. You're getting exercise, you're running errands, and you're smiling at people face-to-face."

Bill Lindeke, an urban geographer in St. Paul who pens the Twin City Sidewalks blog, concurs. He calls the walking trend "a silver lining" to the crisis, and ticks off a list of positives: It's healthy, it's fun and you observe things that you normally wouldn't see if you're driving.

But one of the things Lindeke has observed, as have so many others out on foot, is how ill-equipped our sidewalks are to handle increased pedestrian traffic — especially for those trying to social-distance.

"Our streets and sidewalks aren't really ideally designed for a lot of walking," he said. "A lot of cities that are designed for walking have much wider sidewalks than we do in the United States."

Most residential sidewalks in the Twin Cities are about 5 feet wide — too narrow to maintain a 6-foot buffer when parties pass one another. A once-simple stroll can now feel like a real-life version of the video game Frogger, dodging other walkers and joggers.

Although professor Ingrid Schneider studies recreational trail users' behaviors and attitudes, some of her research might help us better understand these encounters, which she's heard described as "sidewalk chicken."

She has been seeing density and spacing issues on trails long before the arrival of coronavirus.

*"It doesn't matter who it is coming at you, how physically able they are, who they are, what they're doing. Do it for everybody."*

— Abigail Johnson, chair, Pedestrian Advisory Committee in Minneapolis

Now that the threat of coronavirus has made "a seemingly simple navigation so much more complex," she recommends that walkers use kindness and common sense and watch the "sidewalk rage."

The pedestrian equivalent of road rage, which has been documented by University of Hawaii researchers, is backed up by Schneider's survey of trail users, which found that roughly 20% of respondents said they reacted to an interference by expressing anger to the person who caused the incident.

Following a few simple guidelines for sidewalk etiquette should help improve the experience on city sidewalks or parkland trails.

### Before you go

- Plan your route: Lindeke encourages pedestrians to select less-traveled routes when possible, avoiding the city lakes and rivers, as well as other popular areas with natural amenities. Better to walk in residential neighborhoods around where you live, or to explore other less-busy areas farther afield.

- Be aware: Pay attention to people you're going to encounter half a block ahead and those coming up behind you. Be especially mindful if you're on your phone or have earbuds in. This isn't really the time for deep thinking or daydreaming during walks. "Try not to get too self-absorbed," Lindeke said.

### Encountering others

Give a sign of acknowledgment: A quick hello, head nod or smile (for the unmasked) is a good way to start. "I think it gets people out of their shells when you have to talk to a stranger," Johnson said. "I think you wake up a little inside and it softens the edges."

- Scoot over: There's no need to invent a new set of hand signals to indicate your intentions, Johnson said. Just move over as soon as you see

someone approaching. She often crosses to the other side of the street as soon as she notices another party coming her way, "just to let them know, like, 'Walk in peace, I'm already far away.'"

- Make room if you can: "Able-bodied folks like myself who are in relatively good health and spry enough to go jogging have a responsibility to make sure that we're not inconveniencing people with more mobility challenges," Lindeke said.

- Forget the hierarchy: Should a parent pushing a stroller move over for a kid learning to bike? Does a dog walker defer to someone carrying a parcel? Don't bother engaging in a complex calculus of whose needs trump whose, "Just get out of the way," Johnson said. "It doesn't matter who it is coming at you, how physically able they are, who they are, what they're doing," she said. "Do it for everybody."

- Dodge adventurously: Johnson suggests seeing your walk as an adventure and turning front lawns, boulevards and streets into your personal parkour course. "If you're physically able, hop in the grass, jump off the curb, do a somersault up the steep hill on the side of your apartment building — just get out of the way," she said.

- Queue up and hush up: If you're in a group, get into single file as you pass others. "One of you falls back behind the other until you pass," explained Juliet Mitchell, a St. Paul etiquette trainer.

Extend the courtesy even further and stop talking as you pass. While a brief foray through someone else's airspace constitutes a low risk for virus transmission, closing your mouth can be a sign of respect. "You are giving the indication: I can't control everything, but I care enough about you to be inconvenienced for a few seconds," she said.

- Joggers should hit the streets: Heavy breathing by runners can disperse aerosols further, increasing the chance of spreading infection and making those around them anxious. Mask-less runners, especially, should consider eschewing the sidewalks for low-traffic streets, Johnson advised.

### When conflicts arise

- Don't scold: If a cyclist is riding cautiously through a nearly empty pedestrian parkway, there's really no need to scold them, Johnson said. Neighbors congregating on the sidewalk to chat may not realize they're blocking the walking lane — cut them some slack.

- Say "Excuse me": If you have limited mobility and someone's in your way, politely ask for space. Mitchell suggests saying, "Excuse me, I'm social-distancing,?" in a lighthearted tone.

- Keep walking: If another person makes a rude comment about your sidewalk etiquette or social-distancing practices, Mitchell advises ignoring the remarks. "Keep a-steppin'," she said. "Don't give them the satisfaction of knowing they riled you up. Don't give them your energy. Life's too short. You don't have to always respond. Just notice it for what it is and keep moving."

## ASYMPTOMATIC VS. PRESYMPTOMATIC

# Defining terms for COVID-19

By Kiersten Willis  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

With evolving updates from the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta about the novel coronavirus, there may be some confusion about the ways it can spread.

There is a difference between asymptomatic and presymptomatic spread of the virus, which causes the disease COVID-19. Here's a breakdown of the differences and some questions people might have about them.

WHO defines asymptomatic spread as when transmission occurs by people who do not have symptoms and will never get them. But these infected carriers could still get others sick.

Conversely, presymptomatic spread is transmission by people who don't look or feel sick but will eventually get symptoms later.

Can people spread the coronavirus if they don't have symptoms?

According to NPR global health correspondent Jason Beaubien, the answer is yes.

"There's documented evidence of people who are not showing any symptoms transmitting this virus to others," he told NPR. "And there are studies in laboratories that have also found that there's transmissible virus in infected people who have not yet gotten sick or may never get sick with COVID."

### How is it possible to spread the coronavirus without symptoms?

People can release droplets from their mouths when they cough or exhale, and that could spread the virus if someone inhales those droplets.

"When you speak, sometimes you'll spit a little bit," Anne Rimoin, an epidemiology professor at UCLA's School of Public Health told CNN. "You'll rub your nose. You'll touch your mouth. You'll rub your eyes. And then you'll touch other surfaces, and then you will be spreading virus if you are infected and shedding (the virus)."

### Is there a way to tell if someone is asymptomatic or presymptomatic?

Since both carriers appear and feel normal, you can't tell the difference between the two. However, symptoms will show up in presymptomatic carriers later on.

"Detailed contact tracing from Taiwan as well as the first European transmission chain in Germany suggested that true asymptomatics rarely transmit," Babak Javid, a principal investigator at Tsinghua University School of Medicine in Beijing and an infectious disease consultant at Cambridge University Hospitals, told the outlet.

"However, those (and many other) studies have found that paucisymptomatic transmission can occur, and in particular, in the German study, they found that transmission often appeared to occur before or on the day symptoms first appeared," Javid added.

The CDC continues to recommend that people wear cloth face coverings to help slow the spread of the virus.

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