

Going out and returning home



by Indian Scientists Response to Covid

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During the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are instructed not to go out unless really necessary. It is extremely important to reduce your physical contact with the outside world. You can decrease the transfer of the disease causing viruses by limiting your contact with people outside your immediate household, but this will work only if you pay attention to personal hygiene as well. When you need to go out to buy essentials like food or medicine, you will have to interact with other people and share the same environment with them. So, it is important to know what you should and should not do before, during and after a trip outside your home. Here we suggest some important precautions to take when you have to leave the house.



When can you leave your house?

Make only essential trips. Keep a list of items needed so that you can combine as many tasks as possible on any single trip. If possible, designate one person in the household to make all trips out of the house, who is not sick and preferably not an elderly person.

Why should you limit your trips?

Limit your trips to decrease the chances of bringing the Coronavirus into your home. This will also decrease the chances of you carrying the virus to the outside world, if you or someone at home has the virus, even though they may not show any symptoms like cough or fever.



How do you protect yourself and others when you are outside your home?

Wear a mask or face covering that you can tie on firmly. You can choose to wear an extra protective layer of clothing (e.g., a light shawl/dupatta) on top of your clothes when you go out. Try to limit your contact with others and keep a distance of 1-2 m from them. Behave as if you, and everyone else around you, are carriers of the virus even though there may not be any obvious symptoms.

When you are outside, avoid touching other people, don't spit, avoid touching your face or mask. You can also carry some hand sanitizer with you to use if you are worried about touching many surfaces.

How do you protect yourself and your household when you come back home?

Remove your footwear at the entrance. Do not wear the same slippers or shoes inside the house that you used when you were outside, unless you wash it with soap and water. You can leave your house/vehicle keys in a separate place and do not handle them unless you are going out. You can also remove any protective layer/s of clothing and reusable face covering or mask, and soak them in soap water right away. Keep another bucket of soapy water and towel near the entrance door to wash and wipe your keys, glasses and other personal items before you wash your hands. You can use rubbing alcohol (70% isopropyl alcohol in water) to wipe your phone with a soft cloth if you took the phone out with you.



You could consider designating an area just inside your house (or if possible outside the house) where you can remove footwear, masks, face covers etc and set them aside for cleaning. If you brought back supplies, you can leave them in this area. You could also use this area to clean off the items you bring home with a soapy cloth. People in the house at higher risk (with other health problems and the elderly), should stay out of this area at all times.



What to do with supplies you bring back?

If you bring back supplies, take a few precautions to prevent someone in your household from touching the package or food (which may still have viruses on it) and then touching their face. Reserve an area at or near the entrance where you can clean them.



Wash vegetables and fruits thoroughly in water before storing them. If you bring in new clothing, wash everything with detergent before use. Coronaviruses survive for shorter periods on porous surfaces such as paper and cardboard. However, it is advisable to wipe any packaging with a cloth dipped in soapy water (or if necessary in a disinfectant like 1% household bleach). Transfer the contents of packets directly into the container where you store them. Discard all packaging in a closed dustbin that you can then clear out as usual. You can wipe any other items, like books, magazines and electronics with hand sanitizer or rubbing alcohol (>60% isopropyl alcohol). Newspapers can be kept aside for a few hours before reading because viruses will get destroyed over time.



After doing all this, remember to wash your hands with soap and water!

Personal hygiene

Try not to touch anyone or any surfaces in the house until you wash your hands. Take a bath with soap as soon as you can after coming back. At the very least, wash all exposed surfaces of your body and feet with soap.

Scrub and wash the protective layers and/or clothing you wore outside before wearing them again. If you absolutely need to go out more often and it is not possible to wash clothes frequently, you can use a protective layer of clothing that you leave near the entrance and reuse it. But it is advisable that you wash your reusable mask after every use.



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