

Frequently Asked Questions WBG/IMF Contractors in Country Offices/Overseas Offices

This document has been produced to provide guidance to contracting staff working within Country Offices/Overseas Offices, in relation to the current COVID-19 situation.

Seasonal Flu and Pneumonia Vaccines

Should I get vaccinated against the flu this year?

Yes. Flu vaccination is recommended each year during flu season for everyone 6 months and older, with some [rare exceptions](#). This year in particular, as individuals are increasing their personal contact with others which could increase the potential for exposure to the flu. This will help protect you against the flu and prevent potential avoidable visits to medical providers where you may be presumed to have COVID-19. Getting the flu vaccine will also help limit the impact on potentially scarce health care resources as they are still dealing with the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the northern hemisphere, the flu season runs from October through March, and in the southern hemisphere it runs from April through September. In tropical and sub-tropical regions, flu may spread year-round. You should check with your doctor about getting the flu vaccine during flu season where you are living. In the U.S. and other northern hemisphere countries, the flu vaccine is usually available in October, but may be received from September if available. In southern hemisphere countries the flu vaccine is usually available in April.

In CO locations: check with your medical provider about where you can get the vaccine.

Should I get a pneumococcal vaccine or vaccines against any other diseases?

While COVID-19 is known to cause atypical pneumonia in some patients with moderate to severe illness, existing pneumococcal vaccines do not prevent this type of pneumonia. Pneumococcal vaccines protect against pneumonia caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria, which is only one of several causes of pneumonia. Typically, children younger than 2 years old and adults age 65 and older get vaccinated against pneumonia. Some adults with underlying chronic health problems or who are smokers may also receive the pneumococcal vaccine, if recommended by their doctor. You should check with your doctor if you fall into one of these categories.

It is always important to receive standard recommended vaccinations according to your country's vaccination schedule. If you think you have missed vaccines for diseases such as measles, polio, tetanus, meningitis, or hepatitis A or B, or others, talk to your doctor about getting vaccinated. These are important tools in preventing illness.

Masks & Cloth Face Coverings

When should I use a facemask and which type?

The WHO, U.S. CDC, and other national health authorities recommend wearing masks to prevent transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19. This applies to both unvaccinated AND vaccinated individuals in areas with substantial or high transmission. Proper use of facemasks [can help prevent the spread of COVID-19](#). A significant amount of COVID-19 transmission occurs when people have no symptoms. Facemasks limit the droplets and aerosol particles being exhaled into the environment from someone potentially infected. When properly worn, a mask also protects the person wearing it from others' respiratory droplets and aerosols.

NOTE: Health authorities in some countries have either required or recommended medical grade masks for better filtration. Where recommended or required by local authorities, staff should follow those guidelines.

HSD reminds staff that protection provided by a mask depends on both filtration and fit. While medical grade N95 masks may provide a higher filtration, they will not provide improved protection if they do not fit well.

Tips on Fit:

To be effective, a mask must be worn over the mouth and nose.

If you have a mask with a nose wire, mold the wire to your nose bridge to close gaps.

Improve the fit of a disposable mask and eliminate the side gap by knotting the ear loops near the mask and tucking in the side of the mask for a close fit.

Two ways to check for fit:

- Exhale while feeling for airflow out the sides, top, and bottom of the mask with your hands.
- When you inhale, the mask should collapse toward your face, indicating no air being pulled in through the edges of the mask.

Tips on Filtration:

A mask should be at least 2 layers thick

- Disposable masks are often made with 3-5 layers of fused material
- Cloth masks should be made with at least 2 layers of tightly woven breathable material. Check this by seeing if the fabric blocks light when held up to a bright light.

When using a face covering or mask of any kind, it is essential to also use other measures to prevent spread of disease, avoiding the "**3 Cs**":

- **Close contact** with others (stay at least 2 meters/6 feet away from others who are not in your household),
- **Crowded places**, and
- **Closed spaces** with poor ventilation.

Also remember to avoid touching your face and wash your hands frequently with soap and water.

Cloth and disposable masks and respirators

Use: For the general public when outside the home, especially when undertaking activities where a distance of 2 meters/6 feet or more from others cannot always be maintained, such as when using public transport, in shops, or in other confined or crowded environments. They should also be used when caring for someone sick with COVID-19 in your home, or by someone who is sick with COVID-19 and is being cared for by family or household members.

Purpose: To help prevent spread of infection from you to others, and from others to you. Because a significant amount of transmission occurs when people do not (yet) have symptoms, it is important to wear a mask anytime outside your household.

- [WHO: Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) advice for the public: When and how to use masks](#)
- [CDC: Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#)

Specifications: There are many different varieties of cloth and disposable masks and respirators. They should cover the nose and mouth and fit well without gaps. You should feel no air flow through or out the sides, top, or bottom of the mask. Cloth masks should be at least 2 layers to be effective, should not be "see through", and should have ear straps or head straps / ties in order to ensure a good fit.

Recommendations: In high-risk situations, consider wearing a [non-medical respirator mask that meets a quality standard](#) (such as a KN95). High risk situations include: crowded environments (whether indoors or outdoors), especially when with others of unknown vaccination status; caring for a COVID positive family member; if you have a medical condition (such as an immunocompromise) that puts you at higher risk for severe illness with COVID-19, even if vaccinated.

Medical masks / N95 respirators

Use: For healthcare workers caring for patients ill with COVID-19.

Purpose: To protect themselves from illness transmitted by sick patient. N95 masks require specific training and fit testing to be used effectively and should be reserved for healthcare workers.

Some national and local health authorities require people to wear face coverings or masks in public places and may enforce this. You should follow local requirements in such locations.

Will mask wearing be required while in WBG buildings/offices?

Yes, for all entrants to WBG HQ buildings during Tiers 2 and 1 face masks are required except when working in an individual office alone with the door closed. This is following HSD's review of updated guidance (CDC and DC Public Health) that all individuals, including those who are vaccinated, should wear masks in indoor settings.

In Country Offices, staff who are returning to the office are also required to wear masks as outlined above. CO staff should also follow other local health and safety requirements.

COVID-19 Testing

For those living outside the U.S., in general, testing is under the control of local health authorities and may require a doctor's referral. Individuals should consult with their doctor in that location. As testing needs to be conducted as part of a local medical strategy and support infrastructure, COs are encouraged to coordinate with UN Country Teams who are developing local solutions as part of the UN First Line of Defense initiative (FLOD), in partnership with UN and ILO clinics where present.

Can I be tested to see if I am immune to COVID-19?

Tests for COVID-19 antibodies (which may be an indicator of past infection) are available on the market, however they have varying accuracy and reliability. Even those tests which are validated may have a high rate of false positive or false negative results, meaning they cannot accurately tell you if you were infected with COVID-19 in the past or are immune to COVID-19. Antibody testing is also [not currently recommended](#) to assess for immunity to COVID-19 following COVID-19 vaccination or to assess the need for vaccination in an unvaccinated person.

A positive result from an antibody test does not mean you have a specific amount of immunity to COVID-19, and a negative test (showing no antibodies) after vaccination does not mean you do not have immunity. Since vaccines induce antibodies to specific viral protein targets, post-vaccination antibody test results will be negative in those who have not been infected with COVID-19 if the test used does not detect the specific antibodies induced by the vaccine. See the [U.S. CDC guidelines for antibody testing](#) for more information.

I am Sick

What should I do if I have COVID-19?

Stay home and away from others. Your actions make a difference in limiting the spread of illness. Get rest and stay hydrated. Talk to your doctor to discuss your symptoms and to see whether you should be tested or need specific treatment.

Use good hygiene to prevent spreading your illness to others. Isolate yourself from other members of your household to the degree possible, sleeping in a separate bedroom and using a separate bathroom if available. Wear a mask around other household members and maintain at least a 2 meter/6 foot distance. Have your household members wear a mask any time they may need to be around you as well. Limit the time you spend in any common areas

or around others in your home, even when maintaining physical distance and masking. Clean any high touch surfaces frequently.

If you or any household member that is ill has severe symptoms of illness, including emergency warning signs for COVID-19 such as trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in your chest, bluish lips or face, or new confusion or difficulty being woken, seek emergency medical care right away.

If symptoms of illness are not severe, but you need to seek medical care:

- Contact your healthcare provider by phone.
- If you need a healthcare provider, see "Finding a Healthcare Provider / COVID-19 Testing."
- If you must go out to receive medical care, wear a mask.

When can I be around others or return to the office after being diagnosed or ill with COVID-19?

People (who are not immunocompromised*) who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 can be around others / return to the office when:

- **If they were ill with symptoms:** A minimum of 10 days has passed since the first symptoms of illness, 24 hours with no fever (without the use of fever-reducing medications), and other symptoms improving (some symptoms such as fatigue or lack of ability to smell may last longer and do not indicate infectiousness to others).
- **If they were asymptomatic:** A minimum of 10 days after testing positive.

*If you are immunocompromised, confirm with your doctor when it is safe to be around others.

It is not necessary to be retested for COVID-19 if meeting the above criteria.

Reminder: Any unvaccinated individual who has been in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 should quarantine for 14 days after the last contact with the individual. Vaccinated individuals do not need to quarantine if they have no symptoms, [according to the U.S. CDC](#), but should be tested 3 to 5 days after exposure and wear a mask indoors for 14 days following exposure or until their test result is negative. In the case of family/household contacts of ill individuals, those non-ill individuals should quarantine for 14 days after their household contact is no longer infectious per the above parameters. At any time, if an individual who is quarantining develops symptoms, they should isolate themselves and be tested for COVID-19.

I am not Sick

What should I do if I have had close contact with a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case?

If you know that you have been in close contact* with someone confirmed to have COVID-19, or who was declared a probable case and you are unvaccinated, you should quarantine (stay

at home) and avoid contact with others for a period of 14 days from the last known contact with the ill person. If you are vaccinated, you do not need to quarantine if you have no symptoms, [according to the U.S. CDC](#). However, you must be tested 3 to 5 days after exposure and wear a mask indoors for 14 days following exposure, or until you test negative. If you develop symptoms at any time, you should isolate yourself and be tested for COVID-19. If you develop symptoms or are tested for COVID-19, contact HSD. Your confidentiality will be respected.

If living with someone who is sick with COVID-19, do not go to work and avoid contact with others. [Follow instructions for minimizing your exposure outlined by the U.S. CDC](#). Local public health authorities should give you guidance on when you will be able to end your self-isolation.

*While data to precisely define "close contact" is limited, the U.S. CDC has [updated its definition](#) to mean being within 2 meters/6 feet of an infected individual for 15 cumulative minutes over a 24 hour period (this may include multiple short contacts that add up to 15 minutes). This expansion of the definition (from 15 consecutive minutes of contact) is based on [new data](#), meaning that multiple short contacts that add up to 15 minutes or more may pose a risk for transmission.

About COVID-19

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person through respiratory particles that are exhaled when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, sings, or breathes. This happens most directly when someone is in close contact with an infected person (within 2 meters/6 feet). But in some cases, it may happen at further distances with particles that are airborne. This airborne or aerosol transmission may mean that you can get COVID-19 even when not in close contact with someone, particularly if you are in a poorly ventilated space, among crowds, and if not wearing a face mask. Please see [WHO](#) and [CDC](#) information on how COVID-19 spreads.

It is important to be aware that the virus can be spread by people that have NO symptoms. In a [study published by JAMA](#) (The Journal of the American Medical Association), over 50% of transmission of COVID-19 may be from individuals who are asymptomatic (either pre-symptomatic or who never develop symptoms).

The virus may spread by touching surfaces where respiratory droplets from infected people have landed, but this is more likely to happen in locations such as medical facilities or when taking care of a COVID-19 patient at home. If you touch a surface and then touch your nose, mouth or eyes without washing your hands, you may infect yourself. Therefore, it is important to not touch your face, and to wash your hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with soap and water after you have been in a public place or if you have been around someone who is sick.

Since COVID-19 can be spread by people who have no symptoms and [newer variants spread more easily than the original SARS CoV-2 strain](#), it is important to wear a mask whenever you are in close contact with others or in crowded conditions, even if you are vaccinated.

The best protection against any transmission of SARS CoV-2 is getting vaccinated when possible, proper distancing of at least 2 meters/6 feet from others who are not part of your

household, wearing a mask or face covering when leaving home, and following these guidelines:

- Avoid the "3 Cs": crowded places, close contact settings, confined and enclosed spaces such as bars, restaurants, places of worship, gyms, waiting rooms, etc.
- Outdoors is better than indoors.
- Fresh air/open windows are safer than recirculated air.
- Proper filtration in ventilation systems is important.
- In indoor environments, spacing, number of people, time spent indoors, and type of activities can affect the risk level (i.e. gyms where people are breathing heavily are riskier than an office where proper distancing is maintained).

What are the symptoms?

- Fever (38.0 C/100.4 F or higher) or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Symptoms may be mild to severe and can appear from 1 to 14 days after exposure. If you or anyone you know experiences any of the following signs or symptoms while infected with COVID-19, seek emergency medical care right away: trouble breathing, persistent chest pressure or pain, new confusion, inability to stay awake, bluish lips or face.

How do I prevent myself and others from becoming infected?

- Get vaccinated against COVID-19 when you have the opportunity.
- Maintain physical distance of at least 2 meters/6 feet from all individuals who are not part of your household.
- Wear a mask or face covering outside of your home when you may encounter other non-household members (outdoors and indoors). A mask should be worn in any indoor setting where there are others around, EVEN IF maintaining a 2 meter/6-foot distance.

- Avoid crowded areas, close contact settings, and confined or enclosed spaces with poor air circulation. Do not host or participate in any large gatherings.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds, especially when returning from any public setting, before eating, and before touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. If no soap is available use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- When coughing and sneezing, do NOT remove your mask (if you are outside of your home).
- If you are exposed to someone known or suspected to have COVID-19, and are not fully vaccinated, you should self-quarantine for 14 days after the last known contact and monitor your health for symptoms of COVID-19. This self-quarantine period should include limiting contact with other household members (sleeping in a separate bedroom, if possible, and wearing a mask around others in your household). [According to the U.S. CDC](#), If you are fully vaccinated, you do not need to quarantine unless you have symptoms.
- If you were in a situation with high risk of COVID-19 transmission (such as a large gathering), monitor yourself for 14 days to see if you develop symptoms and follow distancing and masking precautions. If the gathering you attended has confirmed COVID-19 cases, discuss with your doctor whether you were exposed and whether you need to quarantine for 14 days and be tested.

Practice prudent social distancing measures:

- Avoid visiting elderly or vulnerable people if you and they are not vaccinated.
- Have your children practice social distancing if they are too young to be vaccinated or if they are not vaccinated. They should maintain at least 2 meters/6 feet from other unvaccinated children, especially in indoor settings, and wear a mask if indoors or in outdoor areas where they cannot maintain a distance from others. Cases in children can be asymptomatic, and you may not know if your child or someone else's child has COVID-19.
- If restaurants are open, do not dine indoors if you are not vaccinated.
- Do not attend or host gatherings among unvaccinated individuals.
- Go shopping only for essential items. Visit the grocery store at off-peak periods or when it is quieter.
- Minimize use of public transportation if you can for those who are unvaccinated and where crowding is present. If you need to use public transportation, use during off-peak times. Avoid being in cars/buses with lots of people. If you are able, use a private car.

What if I have a chronic medical condition and may be at a higher risk for illness from COVID-19?

Certain individuals are at [higher risk](#) of severe illness from COVID-19. Those who are at higher risk should get vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as they are able. That includes older adults ([risk increases with age](#)) and those with [certain medical conditions](#):

- Cancer;
- Chronic kidney disease;
- Chronic lung diseases, including obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma (moderate to severe), interstitial lung disease, cystic fibrosis, and pulmonary hypertension;
- Dementia or other neurological conditions;
- Diabetes (type 1 or 2);
- Down syndrome;
- Heart conditions (such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies, or hypertension);
- HIV infection;
- Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system);
- Liver disease;
- Overweight (defined as a body mass index (BMI) of $> 25\text{kg/m}^2$ but $< 30\text{kg/m}^2$), obesity (BMI $\geq 30\text{ kg/m}^2$ but $< 40\text{ kg/m}^2$), or severe obesity (BMI of $\geq 40\text{kg/m}^2$), with the risk of severe COVID-19 illness increasing sharply with elevated BMI;
- Pregnancy;
- Sickle cell disease or thalassemia;
- Smoking, current or former;
- Solid organ or blood stem cell transplant;
- Stroke or cerebrovascular disease, which affects blood flow to the brain;
- Substance use disorders.

See the [CDC's detailed list here](#).

For those who are at higher risk, ensure that you have enough of any prescription medications you take, and strictly follow social distancing and masking guidelines. Stay in touch with your doctor to ensure that your underlying medical condition is closely monitored. If you get sick, do not delay in seeking medical care.

Is it safe to gather with my family or community for celebrations or other events?

The [U.S. CDC advises](#) that individuals who are fully vaccinated may resume activities that they did prior to the pandemic, but should wear a mask indoors in areas with substantial or high transmission (substantial transmission is defined by 50 new cases per 100,000 people in the last 7 days and high transmission is 100 new cases per 100,000 in the last 7 days).

When in a situation where there will be a mixed group of vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, those who are unvaccinated should continue to maintain distance and wear a mask, and even vaccinated individuals may want to do so depending on the size and location (outdoors or indoors) of the gathering. Also keep in mind the need to protect children who are still too young to be vaccinated and [who should continue masking and distancing](#). Because it is not yet clear to what degree vaccination prevents someone from spreading COVID-19 to others if infected, vaccinated parents of young unvaccinated children should consider carefully in what situations they may want to use a mask.

If you or any of the participants in a gathering become ill with symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath, tiredness, aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea) after the gathering, any unvaccinated individual who was in contact with or around that person in the 2 days before symptoms started needs to self-quarantine for a period of 14 days from their last contact with that person. Those who are vaccinated and were exposed should get tested 3 to 5 days after exposure and wear a mask in public indoor setting for 14 days or until they receive a negative test, and monitor themselves for symptoms. If they become symptomatic, they should quarantine.

Travel

Are there specific testing requirements before traveling?

Many countries require a negative COVID-19 test for entry. The [U.S. requires](#) that all passengers traveling from overseas show a negative viral test taken no more than 3 days before their flight. For those recently ill with COVID-19 (within the last 90 days), they must show documentation of recovery: a copy of previous positive viral test results and a letter from their healthcare provider or a public health official that states they have been cleared for travel or cleared to end isolation.

You should check the testing requirements before travel with the health authorities of the destination country or location. Here is one location where you can find international travel restrictions: [IATA Travel Regulations Map](#).