

A cluster of several coronavirus particles is shown on the left side of the page. The particles are spherical with a textured, orange-to-red surface and numerous purple, spike-like protrusions extending from their outer layer. They are set against a light, blurred background.

Endoscopy and the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Guide for Patients

Q1. What is COVID-19?

A1. COVID-19 stands for Coronavirus Disease 2019. It is caused by the virus “Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)” from the family of coronaviruses. In December of 2019, this new coronavirus began spreading, and has now become a global problem (pandemic). A person who is sick with the virus SARS-CoV-2 has the disease COVID-19.

Q2. How is COVID-19 spread?

A2. The main route of transmission is person-to-person spread via respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs. Transmission can also occur via direct contact or surface contamination. For example, the virus may be transmitted if an infected person coughs into their hands and then touches a doorknob, and another person then touches that doorknob and then their face. Proper coughing (into your sleeve or a tissue paper) and frequent hand washing are the best methods to reduce the risk for such transmission.

Q3. Can COVID-19 be spread from the GI tract?

A3. Components of the virus can be detected in the feces of infected patients although less is known about the likelihood of intact viral particles from fecal contaminants actually causing an infection in another individual. Likewise, the risk of transmitting virus through saliva, or other body fluids has not yet been studied in detail. Regular and proper hand washing is the best method to reduce such transmission risk.

Q4. Can people with COVID-19 who do not have symptoms infect another person?

A4. Yes. From the time a person contracts the SARS-CoV-2 virus, it can take up to 14 days for symptoms to develop (average of 5 days). Viral shedding and transmission to another person can occur several days prior to symptom development.

Q5. Can I get the coronavirus from a contaminated endoscope during my procedure?

A5. No, not if standard procedures for endoscope cleaning and reprocessing are being followed. Coronavirus is readily eradicated by the high level disinfection process used to clean endoscopes after every procedure.

Q6. Do I need to wear a mask when entering the endoscopy suite or the GI clinic?

A6. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that infected patients or those suspected of being infected, such as anyone with new onset respiratory symptoms, should wear a mask to reduce the spread of respiratory droplets with coughing. Standard surgical masks do not prevent the inhalation of virus particles, and it is therefore important to keep a safe distance (> 6 feet) from potentially infected individuals.

Q7. Should I come for my endoscopic procedure if I have any symptoms?

A7. Please contact your healthcare provider by phone or website portal to make them aware of any symptoms you

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are having before coming in person. They will give you recommendations about the best course of action.

Q8. Can I get infected if the last patient in the endoscopy suite had the virus?

A8. This is highly unlikely. Endoscopy unit staff decontaminate and disinfect surfaces before and after each procedure. Your endoscopy team and the medical facility staff will employ all methods to minimize the risk of you getting exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 virus during your visit.

Q9. If I am taking immunosuppressive medicines (for example, for Crohn's disease or chemotherapy for cancer), am I at a higher risk of acquiring COVID-19?

A9. It is not known whether patients on immunosuppressive medicines are at higher risk of getting this coronavirus. Having an endoscopic procedure while on these medicines does not increase your risk of becoming infected.

Q10. Can my physician give me coronavirus during my endoscopic procedure?

A10. This is highly unlikely. Physicians performing your procedure wear masks, gloves, gowns, and other personal protective equipment that helps prevent any spread of the virus. Your endoscopy team and the medical facility staff will employ all methods to minimize the risk of you getting exposed to this virus during your visit.

Q11. My endoscopic procedure was cancelled and rescheduled for a later date. Will my health be compromised because of this delay?

A11. The best way to avoid acquiring COVID-19 is to stay away from people that may have the virus ("social distancing"). Your GI provider has carefully reviewed your history and reason for performing your endoscopic procedure. It has been determined that rescheduling your procedure is safe and allows you to minimize any potential exposures within the medical facility. If you have any further questions or concerns about being asked to reschedule, please contact your healthcare provider.

Q12. Where can I find more information about COVID-19?

A12. Information about COVID-19 can be found on the following websites:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- World Health Organization (WHO)
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

You can also find information specific to your state on your state government websites.



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