

Access Brigham Health – Follow-up Q&A

During and following our June 3 Access Brigham Health event, Transitioning to a New Normal, we were inundated with questions about COVID-19. Below are answers to a consolidated set of the most frequently asked questions.

Please note that best way to protect yourself from COVID-19 exposure is to wear a mask if you cannot maintain six feet of distance, to practice good hand-washing hygiene, and to stay home if you have symptoms. If you have specific questions about COVID-19 related to an underlying condition or medication you are taking, you should contact your primary care physician directly for guidance.

1. Should I disinfect all groceries and if yes, what is the best method? Should I wear gloves in the grocery store?

The risk of contracting COVID-19 from groceries is very low. Indeed, we are not aware of any COVID-19 cases where transmission was linked to groceries. We recommend diligent handwashing before and after going to the grocery store and after handling groceries. You should wear a mask for the duration of the trip and take care to avoid touching your face. Hand hygiene is preferable to gloves for two reasons: gloves are not usually washed or changed as often as you should clean your hands, and gloves do not prevent transmission if they are contaminated and touch the face.

2. Is it safe to go the barber or hair salon? Go to the dentist? Use a public bathroom? Go to the gym? Have a house cleaner or other home maintenance professional to come into my house?

While all contact activities will carry some level of risk, businesses and other public venues should all be instituting their own measures. These may include frequent disinfection, mandated masking and hand hygiene, symptom attestation, and distancing. Ask your service providers about their policies regarding these measures and avoid visiting any public places if you are sick.

Below is some general guidance about the safety of specific activities:

- **Barbers and hair salons:** Safe to visit as long as the barber/hairdresser spends most of his/her time behind you and both of you are wearing masks.
- **Dentists:** Safe to visit presuming the office is set up in accordance with the above standards, and as long as providers are wearing appropriate personal protective equipment, ideally a mask and a face shield.
- **Public restrooms:** Fine to use public bathrooms as long as they're not crowded. Be sure to wash your hands well after you're done.

- **Gyms:** Same as above. You should check to make sure the gym or fitness facility is set up to maintain at least six feet of spacing between users, that all people present wear masks including while exercising, and that there is frequent cleaning of all equipment, which should be wiped down before and after each use. If it is possible to exercise outside, that's preferable.
- **Service professionals in your home:** Prior to entering your home, ask individual providers if they are currently experiencing any symptoms and insist they wear masks while inside.

3. What advice do you have about air travel? If asymptomatic, is it safe to travel within the country? Do I need to quarantine after flying?

Different destinations have their own guidance about quarantine upon arrival, so check before your departure. Air travel carries a higher risk of prolonged, close proximity with others whose good health or hygiene cannot be guaranteed. Many airlines are screening passengers before allowing them to fly, which helps but is not perfect. Universal masking of all passengers and flight attendants will decrease the risk of transmission, but you would need to weigh the need to travel against the possibility of exposure.

4. Are summer day camps safe? What precautions should I take or insist on for my children going to day camp?

Summer camps are working with local departments of public health to determine whether they can operate safely under current restrictions. Camps that do open will be required to institute some combination of symptom monitoring, masking, social distancing, and strict hand hygiene. Please read the [CDC's suggestions about summer camps](#) for more detailed guidance.

5. How can college students stay safe when they return to college dorms, classes, and dining halls?

When students are allowed to physically return to school, they should continue maintaining the same hygienic behaviors that they should be doing now. Important measures students should use include wearing masks while in class or other group settings, staying at least six feet apart from others if unmasked or eating, and following strict hand hygiene. Staying home or self-isolating while sick is also very important to avoid the spread of COVID and other respiratory infections. Some colleges are also considering putting into place routine testing requirements, app-based symptom screening, and contact tracing for students or staff that test positive.

6. Is it safe for multi-generational families from different households to visit or vacation together in the same home? Are there special precautions to take regarding shared spaces (including bathrooms)?

Families who do not share a household should weigh the desire to gather together with the risks of prolonged in-person contact or close proximity. These risks can be substantively reduced by: making sure no one is sick and that everyone is using vigorous and frequent hand hygiene, avoiding sharing items (utensils, food, toys, appliances), and frequently cleaning common surfaces. In general, it's best to wear a mask when within six feet of others who live outside your household.

7. What do you anticipate is the timeline for a vaccine?

Several different parties are working to develop a vaccine. Even with this enormous energy and effort, the earliest we anticipate a vaccine is early 2021.

8. What is the Brigham doing to help vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by COVID-19?

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, we have taken extra measures to address social inequities and partner with vulnerable members of our neighboring communities to help detect and prevent infections. We established teams to address employee and patient health equity and mobilized community-based testing in neighborhoods that experienced high rates of infection. We also performed screenings for social determinants of health and, in response to those screens, distributed food and care kits, multilingual information packets, and promoted access to care regardless of insurance or immigration status.

9. What are the Brigham's plans for re-opening? When can I have my elective surgery or annual in-person physical?

The Brigham is always open for critical and emergency care. For other clinical services, our first priority is assisting patients whose surgeries or procedures were deferred. Brigham clinical teams are actively identifying patients who are in most need of these services, working with each patient on their individual treatment plan and rescheduling their appointments. We expect that patients will soon be able to reschedule other elective procedures, in-person medical tests, and appointments, as well. In the meantime, virtual visits, including first-time consultations for procedures and surgeries, remain an option. Please check our [website](#) for the most up-to-date patient and visitor information.