



PA Institutional  
Law Project

# COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Info Sheet

PA Prisons and Jails  
*Updated April 2021*



Lewisburg  
Prison Project

## What is COVID-19?

COVID-19, or Coronavirus, is a new virus that began to spread throughout the world in November of 2019. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person contact, although it can also spread on shared surfaces. The virus can be passed between people who are not showing symptoms (asymptomatic), as well as those who are experiencing symptoms.

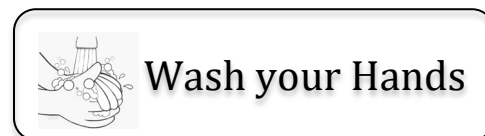
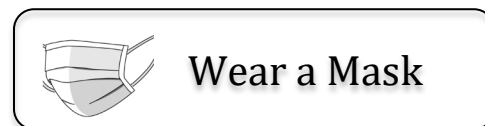
People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported — ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. These symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste or smell

## How can you protect yourself?

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus. This can be done by limiting your exposure to other people and the things that other people touch.

1. First, you should **stay six feet apart** from other people at all times if possible. This is called “social distancing.”
2. Second, **wear a clean mask** anytime you are in a situation where you will be closer than 6 feet to other people.
3. Third, be sure to **wash your hands** for at least 20 seconds after coming into contact with doors, trays, handles, or other objects that others have touched.
4. Fourth, **clean and disinfect** frequently touched surfaces daily.



## How should prisons and jails respond to COVID-19?

1. Limit exposure and enforce social distancing measures
  - Limit group gatherings to 10 people or fewer.
  - Allow activities to be conducted at a safe 6-foot distance (phone calls, law library, showers, recreation, dining, etc.)
  - Restrict movement in and out of institutions (no in-person visits, prisoner transfers, non-essential outside appointments, etc.)
  - Provide masks to the incarcerated population as well as prison staff.
2. Clean and sanitize
  - Ensure that staff and incarcerated persons have easy and free access to soap, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies.
  - Common areas and shared items, such as phones, kiosks, or showers, should be sanitized in between each use.
3. Monitor symptoms and isolate those with symptoms or illness.
  - Establish intake screening procedures for staff and new arrivals
  - Monitor symptoms among the incarcerated population on a regular basis.
  - Isolating those with symptoms and those who have been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 for at least 14 days.
4. Provide access to medical care and necessary services
  - Incarcerated people should still have access to medical care even if their institution is under lockdown conditions. This includes daily medications, chronic care treatment, and access to sick call as needed.
  - Housing and/or medical units should have a designated section for those with COVID-19 symptoms.
  - Out-of-cell time and recreation are vital even during this crisis, and recreation should be provided on a daily basis. It can be staggered in groups.
  - Incarcerated people should have access to phones and videocalls with family and friends. It is best when this is provided for free during this crisis.
  - Incarcerated people should have the ability to speak and communicate with attorneys through confidential legal calls and legal mail.

## What should you do if your institution is placing you at risk?

If you feel that your rights are being violated as a result of any new procedures or conditions at your institution, please write or call us via the information below:

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Please note the Lewisburg Prison Project and the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project assist incarcerated people with issues related to the conditions of their confinement (e.g., medical, mental health, excessive force, etc.). We do not assist people with criminal matters, habeas cases, sentencing issues, or parole, and cannot assist with early or compassionate release.