



# Arkansas Department of Health

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Governor Asa Hutchinson  
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## **Strategy for preventing COVID-19 spread this winter**

There is a strong desire to return to normalcy as the weather cools and the holiday season approaches. However, the threat of COVID-19 remains real and may even be heightened as outdoor activities become less feasible. It's critical that Arkansans take steps that will protect the people around them in the coming months.

Each of the steps outlined below offers protection against spreading the virus, but each one alone is not enough. We need to take multiple precautions to limit the spread of COVID-19 so we can make it through this season as safely as possible. Using all of these strategies together can significantly decrease the spread of the virus and keep each of us and our loved ones healthy and safe.

### **Masking**

Wearing a simple cloth face covering over your nose and mouth helps prevent spreading COVID-19 to the people around you. Face coverings have also now been shown to provide protection to the person wearing the face covering as well. Talking, singing, coughing and sneezing all create tiny droplets that can transmit the virus. Masks act as a barrier, decrease the spread of those tiny droplets, and reduce the chances of infecting other people, as well as protecting you. Remember: You, and those around you, can have COVID-19 and not know it, so masks should be worn anytime you are around others even if you don't think you are sick.

The State of Arkansas currently has a [mask mandate](#) in place for indoor and outdoor settings where you are exposed to non-household members and social distancing cannot be assured, with a few exceptions.

### **Social distancing**

COVID-19 is primarily spread from person to person. Maintaining a distance of six feet or more between yourself and others goes a long way toward stopping the spread. If you're infectious and don't know it, you're less likely to infect others if you're careful about keeping your distance. Also, if you happen to encounter a person who is positive, you're less likely to catch COVID-19 if you stay at least six feet apart. This also applies to situations where you are with family or friends who don't live in your household. Social gatherings of more than 10 people should be avoided, and so should crowded areas. Large events of 100 or more people are required to have a plan approved by the Arkansas Department of Health and follow masking and social distancing guidelines.

## **Testing**

If you have any symptoms like fever, cough or shortness of breath, or if you have recently been exposed to a person who has COVID-19, get tested. Testing is available across the state, including by appointment at Local Health Units in every county at no cost to you. Also remember that if you have symptoms or have been exposed, it's especially important to follow [ADH guidelines for staying home and away from others](#) until it's confirmed that it's safe to go back out.

The Arkansas Department of Health continues to expand its testing capacity in its Public Health Laboratory and with partners across the state. As we go into the winter season when other respiratory viruses also circulate, testing will become even more important.

## **Contact tracing**

Contact tracing is your chance to help solve the COVID-19 puzzle. If you test positive, you can help stop the chain of transmission by tracing your steps and identifying close contacts. If have not tested positive and you get a call from a contact tracer, please answer or call the contact tracer back. The contact tracer is calling to give you important information about a possible exposure and can tell you how to further protect yourself and your loved ones. Other numbers may be used, but four to watch for that are used by our contact tracing vendors are 877-272-6819, 833-283-2019, 501-686-5875 and 501-214-2410. This is crucial to helping stop the spread of the virus.

The Arkansas Department of Health is continuing to expand our case investigation and contact tracing capacity. We are working internally and with our contractors to analyze and improve our contact tracing process to be timely and effective.

## **Compliance Checks**

The Arkansas Department of Health has partnered with the Alcohol Beverage Control Board to conduct COVID-19 compliance checks among bars, food establishments, and other facilities. These compliance checks ensure the establishments are adhering to COVID-19 directives and following approved event plans that will help keep employees and consumers safe and healthy. These checks monitor use of masks by employees and patrons and ensure social distancing is being practiced, required signs are posted, and soap and water or hand sanitizer are provided. The State has also partnered with the Municipal League to encourage adherence to the mask mandate and other public health guidelines in Arkansas cities and towns. Through the winter months, the ADH and others will continue to perform these checks to educate business operators and strengthen compliance.

## **Get a flu shot**

It's never been more important to get a flu shot. We need everyone to stay as healthy as possibly to free up critical resources in our hospitals, and we also want to avoid the potential dangers associated with a patient getting flu and COVID-19 at the same time. The flu shot is safe, effective and available at no expense all across Arkansas at Arkansas Department of Health Local Health Units. Many pharmacies and doctor's offices also carry the flu shot.

## **Stay vigilant to stop the virus**

We all want the pandemic to end, and we will get there. But if we let our guard down, the virus can and will take advantage. It is important to continue taking the precautions lined out in this

document. This isn't easy, but if we all stay strong and each do our part, we can protect one another. With multiple vaccines in clinical trials and plans being developed on how to distribute the vaccines once verified to be effective and safe, there is hope on the horizon.

The Arkansas Department of Health continues to reinforce our strategy and prevention messaging through marketing, social media, media relations, and our website. These messages help remind everyone to keep taking preventative steps, like handwashing, social distancing, wearing masks, and getting tested when needed. You can get updates and help us share messages by following @arhealthdept on Facebook and Instagram, @ADHPIO on Twitter, and by visiting [healthy.arkansas.gov](https://healthy.arkansas.gov).