

Banner Health experts: Staying safe as COVID-19 restrictions ease

Practiced together, CDC guidelines help to reduce risk

TUCSON, Ariz. (May 19, 2020) – As stay-at-home restrictions begin to ease, people are starting to venture out of their homes, and some are even returning to work. But that doesn't mean that the virus has gone away—or that there is a vaccine or a cure.

Following the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Brandie Anderson, RN, MPH, CIC, infection prevention director at [Banner – University Medical Center Tucson](#), shares health and safety tips to protect yourself and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Continue to practice social distancing

According to the CDC, the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus. COVID-19 spreads from person to person through respiratory droplets that are produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. Even a person without symptoms can spread the virus, so it's important to continue practicing social distancing— stay six feet apart from other people and avoid crowded places and mass gatherings.

Wash your hands often

Yes, you need to continue washing your hands often, especially after you've been in a public place or after you've blown your nose, coughed or sneezed. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. And last, but not least, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

Cover your mouth and nose when in public

Everyone should wear a cloth face cover—whether it's a mask, bandana or homemade face covering—when out in public and it is difficult to maintain social distancing measures, including trips to the grocery store or pharmacy. As recommended by current CDC guidelines, there is no need for a surgical mask or N-95 respirator. Save these critical supplies for health care workers and first responders.

Ensure your mask fits properly. Your mask should cover your mouth and nose and fit snugly, but comfortably, against the side of your face. Although your mask should include multiple layers, it should allow for breathing without restriction.

Just as important, when you return home, remove your mask with care, avoiding your eyes, nose and mouth, and wash your mask regularly.

Wearing gloves when in public

"While wearing gloves when out in public might make you feel safer, if they are not used perfectly, they could easily get you sick," said Anderson. "Think of touching germs on a surface as similar to touching red paint. If you're wearing gloves and you touch red paint (the germs), then everything else you touch with those gloves will be contaminated with the red paint (germs), including your cell phone, car keys, eyes, nose or mouth."

Anderson also is adjunct professor at the Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health.

The safest thing to do is to wash your hands thoroughly or use hand sanitizer before you touch your personal items or face.

Maintain healthy habits to boost your immune system

As we venture out, it is important to keep our immune system healthy to help reduce the risk of illness. Keep up that exercise routine, get plenty of sleep, make sure to drink enough water and eat a healthy diet.

Stay at home as much as possible

“ If we practice social distancing but do not wash our hands often, we still risk getting sick by picking up germs from the surfaces we touch and putting them into our bodies by touching our nose, eyes or mouth ”

We're all anxious to resume our normal lives and get back out into the world. But while there is still no cure or vaccine for COVID-19, the safest thing you can do is keep your distance from others by staying at home.

Protections work together

"Each of these recommendations alone is only partially effective," said Anderson. "If we practice social distancing but do not wash our hands often, we still risk getting sick by picking up germs from the surfaces we touch and putting them into our bodies by touching our nose, eyes or mouth."

By practicing all these recommendations, they work together to reduce the risk of spreading the virus to ourselves and each other.

As one of the largest nonprofit health care systems in the country, the team at Banner Health is committed to ensuring all Banner locations are a safe place for care. Headquartered in Phoenix, Banner Health owns and operates 28 acute-care hospitals and an array of other services, including: Banner Imaging, Banner Telehealth and Banner Urgent Care. Team members are dedicated to protecting the health and safety of patients, be it a routine checkup, elective surgery or an urgent health service. Waiting room and employee workstation layouts maintain proper social distancing; screenings are conducted at hospital entrances to verify that all employees and visitors are well; and, all Banner physicians are equipped to visit patients remotely. Learn more about Banner's commitment to safety at bannerhealth.com/safecare.

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