



How to Be Clear During COVID-19

Complexity does not communicate authority. Right now, we need to use the clearest language possible to help people make the right decisions for their health. When using an unfamiliar term, replace it with plain language or include an explanation.

UNFAMILIAR TERM	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLE
 Asymptomatic/ symptomatic	Doesn't feel sick/feels sick	Some people infected with the coronavirus may be asymptomatic, which means they don't feel sick.
 Community spread	People catching the virus as they go about their daily lives	Closing schools and businesses helps prevent community spread or people from catching the virus as they go about their lives.
 Incubation period	The time between catching a virus and feeling sick	According to the CDC, the incubation period (the time from catching the virus to feeling sick) is between 2 and 14 days.
 Intubation	Placed on a ventilator, a machine that helps a patient breathe	If a patient is not getting enough oxygen, a doctor may intubate them, or place them on a ventilator, a machine to help them breathe.
 Novel strain	A new type of virus	Coronaviruses have been around for centuries, but COVID-19 is a novel strain or a new type of the virus.
 Pathogen	Germ	Coronavirus germs can spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
 Patient zero	First person with the virus in a new area.	Patient zero are the words we use for the first person who had the virus in a new area.
 Personal protective equipment (PPE)	Special masks, clothing and gloves to shield a care provider from the virus	Healthcare workers need more personal protective equipment (masks, clothing and gloves) to prevent them from getting the virus.
 Respiratory disease	Lung disease	Someone with a lung disease, or problems breathing, may be at an increased risk of complications from the virus.

 Respiratory droplets	Tiny drops of saliva and mucus from your nose, mouth and lungs that can spread when you cough, sneeze, speak or sing	If you have the coronavirus and are seeking medical care, wear a mask to prevent tiny drops of saliva from infecting others when you speak or cough.
 Social/physical distancing	Avoiding public spaces and keeping 6' of distance between you and other people.	If you need to go to the grocery store or pharmacy, practice physical distancing. Keep 6' of space between you and other people.
 Super-spreader	A person who spreads the virus to many more people than average	While anyone with COVID-19 can spread the virus, 1 in 5 people may be super-spreaders. That means they may spread the virus to more people than average.
 Transmission	Virus passing from one person to another	People who are infected but don't feel sick can still pass the virus to others.
 Underlying conditions	Health conditions not caused by the virus	Patients who have underlying health conditions (other conditions not caused by the virus) are at higher risk for complications from COVID-19.
 Ventilator	A machine that pushes air into a person's lungs to help them breathe	If patients can't get enough oxygen, doctors may need to use a ventilator, a machine that pushes air into their lungs.

Common Coronavirus Terms and Definitions

Avoid confusion by using the right language and explaining what these often-used terms mean. They are NOT interchangeable.

Outbreak: Many people sick with one illness in one area

Vs. Epidemic: Widespread illness in one area

Vs. Pandemic: Many people sick from one illness around the world

Surgical mask: Disposable face mask worn by health professionals to prevent saliva or mucus from coming out or going in

Vs. N95 respirator: Special protective mask that filters tiny particles and viruses

Vs. Face shield: A clear device that protects the entire face from splashes and sprays

Self-isolation: Separating yourself from others because you are sick

Vs. Self-quarantine: Separating yourself from others because you may have been exposed to a sick person

Vs. Shelter in place: Staying home (regardless of whether you are sick or have been exposed), leaving only for essential needs, such as getting food or medicine

Flatten the curve: Slowing the spread of infection, so hospitals and healthcare workers can treat fewer people over time.

For more resources, visit our [COVID-19 marketing page](#) or [reach out](#) if you need help creating coronavirus content.