

6 Places You're Most Likely to Catch Coronavirus



[Brooke Nelson](#) Updated: Apr. 12, 2021



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Life isn't back to normal just yet. As states begin to reopen, experts recommend avoiding spots where coronavirus is most likely to spread.

After more than a year of dealing with coronavirus and shelter-in-place mandates, some good news: Millions are getting vaccinated every day, and people are eagerly venturing out as states begin to reopen. But don't ditch your mask just yet—even if you are fully vaccinated—and make the mistake of thinking life is back to normal. Cases of COVID-19 are climbing nationwide, raising fears of a fourth wave of infections. If you haven't been vaccinated yet, here's what you need to know about the [COVID-19 vaccine](#) and how to get it at [Walmart](#), [CVS](#), [Kroger](#), and [Costco](#).

Many new outbreaks have been linked to places where people are now gathering, including restaurants and fitness centers. In general, these infection hot spots tend to be “indoor environments with limited fresh air flow, where large numbers of people can gather for longer than ten minutes of interactions, and where it is difficult to maintain physical distancing,” according to Boris Lushniak, MD, Dean of the University of Maryland School of Public Health.

When planning your future public outings, consider avoiding these everyday places where experts say infection rates are the highest. Steer clear of these [places doctors won't go during the pandemic](#), too.

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Bars and restaurants

The number one hot spot for coronavirus infections right now is the bar and restaurant scene, according to Dr. Lushniak. “Unfortunately, as bars have reopened, we have seen a large number of young people gathering but not necessarily being wary that COVID-19 is still a problem,” he says. The data backs him up: A recent study found that adults who tested positive for COVID-19 were twice as likely to have dined at a restaurant than those who tested negative. Watch out for the [signs you may have already had COVID-19](#).



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Even bars and restaurants that limit capacity and space tables six feet apart are high-risk environments, Dr. Lushniak says. At bars, in particular, people gather as they wait in line to get in, and most don't wear masks or socially distance. Inside, people spend hours in a small, poorly ventilated space while dancing, eating, sitting or standing close together, and talking over the music. Loud conversations at bars can release up to ten times as many respiratory droplets as a cough, research shows.

At any indoor spot, Dr. Lushniak suggests taking stock of what public health recommendations are being followed. Ask yourself, “Are people wearing masks? Is the six-foot rule being applied? Is it crowded with people?” he says. It’s best to remove yourself from any situation that doesn’t abide by expert-approved safeguards. Experts also recommend following these [guidelines when dining at reopened restaurants](#).

Gyms and fitness centers



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While many people are itching to hit the gym after months of lockdown, research shows that gyms and other fitness centers are hotbeds for COVID. In two new reports by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), scientists linked dozens of COVID-19 cases to two gyms in Chicago and Hawaii. Fifty-five gym members were infected in Chicago and 21 were infected in Hawaii after attending fitness classes with a contagious person who did not show symptoms.

Experts point to insufficient ventilation, large class sizes, and intensity of the workouts for high infection rates at gyms. The fitness centers in both CDC reports followed protocols such as limiting class sizes and screening for [symptoms of COVID-19](#), but neither required members to wear masks while exercising. [Masks](#) have been shown to limit the spread of COVID-19, even among those who don’t seem sick.

If you decide to exercise indoors, choose your gym wisely. The CDC recommends using a facility that opens doors and windows for ventilation, installs barriers between equipment for social distancing, and requires its staff and guests to wear masks. “These practices show we care about our own health but also the health of those around us,” Dr. Lushniak says. “This is the right thing to do and is part of the

weaponry to battle the pandemic.” Those aren’t the only [ways your gym may change forever](#) after lockdown.

Transportation

Traveling—especially on cruises and airplanes—increases your risk of getting and spreading COVID-19, according to the CDC. Not only are passengers coming from many different areas, but they are also spending long periods of time in close quarters, boosting the chances of an outbreak. Four passengers were infected on an 18-hour flight from Dubai to New Zealand last September, a recent CDC study found.

To protect fellow passengers and prevent the spread of COVID-19, travelers are now required to wear masks on planes, buses, trains, and other forms of public transportation across the United States. The CDC also suggests that travelers get tested and self-quarantine before and after a trip. If you have been exposed to COVID-19, are experiencing symptoms, or test positive, the CDC advises canceling your travel plans.



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That said, the CDC recently updated its travel guidelines, saying that fully vaccinated people can travel safely within the United States and do not need to get tested or self-quarantine. Those who haven’t been vaccinated yet, however, are encouraged to stay home. While you wait for your turn to get a shot,

get a taste of what's in store with these [COVID-19 vaccine stories](#) and find out why you shouldn't share your [COVID-19 vaccine card photos](#) on social media.

Crowded beaches and pools



REBECCA EMERY/GETTY IMAGES

If you're hoping to beat the heat this summer, you might want to skip the beach. Coronavirus infection rates at beaches surged last year as the weather warmed up and beachgoers hit the waves. Three clusters of COVID-19 cases in Kentucky and one cluster in Ohio—spanning dozens of people—were connected to visitors returning from Myrtle Beach in South Carolina, according to the *New York Times*. More than 20 student athletes in South Carolina also tested positive after a trip to the beach.

Luckily, beaches allow more airflow than indoor environments, and there is little evidence that the virus can spread to people through water. But experts believe that viral particles can still travel from an infected person to others nearby, especially in places where people linger for hours at a time, like beaches and pools.

Although experts say the virus is more likely to spread inside, you should still take precautions when visiting outdoor spaces like beaches. The CDC recommends wearing a mask and avoiding crowded areas where you can't stay six feet apart from other beachgoers. Here's what you [should \(and shouldn't\) do when visiting public parks](#) this summer, too.

Sporting events

Sports fans might be safer watching the big game from their couches this year. After attending a football game in Kentucky last July, dozens of people tested positive for COVID-19, and 52 cases were linked to a basketball tournament in Iowa the same month. In June 2020, one contagious player infected at least 15 people at an ice hockey game in Florida, according to a recent CDC study.

Like beaches and pools, outdoor sporting arenas are believed to be safer than indoor ones. Yet even outdoors, fans often yell, chant, and sing; sit close together; travel from outside the area, and share food and personal items like noisemakers with others—all risk factors for spreading COVID-19, the CDC says.

Most professional and college sporting events are broadcast live, but fans attending in person should not hesitate to ask about the property’s cleaning and disinfection protocols, according to Dr. Lushniak. “All this is about your personal and your family’s health,” he says. Here’s what [people who’ve been infected with coronavirus](#) want you to know.



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Indoor social gatherings

Not vaccinated yet? Gathering with unvaccinated friends and family who do not live with you is still discouraged by the CDC. Because COVID-19 is believed to spread through tiny droplets in the air, simply being in close contact with a contagious person could increase your risk of infection, even if they don’t show symptoms.

If you are feeling sick or have been exposed to COVID-19 in the past 14 days, it's best to skip social gatherings, according to the CDC. The CDC also recommends hosting any gathering outdoors or in a well-ventilated space. Spacing tables and chairs six feet apart, planning social distancing–friendly activities, wearing face masks, and washing hands frequently can further help to protect guests from infection. You can [prevent these 15 diseases by washing your hands](#), too.

Experts believe [you can get COVID twice](#), so these recommended practices may be here to stay until the majority of us get vaccinated. “Physical distancing, mask wearing, and frequent hand washing need to become part of our culture for the near future,” Dr. Lushniak says. Find out more about the [everyday habits](#) that could (and should) change in a post-coronavirus world