

Toothbrush Safety During COVID-19



HOW TO HELP PROTECT YOUR FAMILY WHEN YOU'RE SICK

COVID-19 is a new disease and we're still learning how it spreads. The virus is thought to spread when infected people cough or sneeze, and possibly by touching contaminated surfaces.¹ It may also be found in a person's saliva.² So when you're sick and you brush your teeth, germs end up on your toothbrush, too. And if it's stored in a shared toothbrush holder, germs can spread to other people in your household.

Not everyone who has COVID-19 shows symptoms, so it's important to practice proper toothbrush hygiene even if you think you're fine. Be extra careful if you have family members who are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19, such as older adults and people with serious underlying medical conditions.

Here are tips to help keep your family healthy, whether you have a cold, the flu, and especially if you contract COVID-19.

Social distance your toothbrush

If you've been exposed to COVID-19 or think you may be sick, isolate your toothbrush just like you'd isolate yourself from the family. Avoid side-by-side storage—instead keep your toothbrush by itself, upright in a cup or other toothbrush holder, by your bedside table or in another separate area.

Wash your hands before brushing or flossing

Never touch your mouth or brush and floss your teeth before first washing your hands thoroughly. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.² You can also use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.² Make sure to wash your hands after brushing and flossing, too.

¹ Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19); cdc.gov; March 2020. | ² Consistent Detection of 2019 Novel Coronavirus in Saliva; Oxford University Press; February 2020.

Disinfect the handle

After using your toothbrush, wipe the handle with a safe household disinfectant. According to the National Institutes of Health, the coronavirus can live for two to three days on plastic, and it is possible for someone to get the virus from touching contaminated surfaces.³ The CDC recommends using a diluted household bleach solution, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants.⁴

Don't contaminate the toothpaste

Be careful if you share a tube of toothpaste with someone else. Don't touch the tip of the tube directly onto your toothbrush. Squeeze a bit of toothpaste onto a cotton swab or piece of wax paper, then apply it to the bristles. Remember, you only need a pea-sized amount.

Never share a toothbrush

Toothbrushes can still have germs on them even after being visibly rinsed clean.⁵ Though adults know better, make sure the kids aren't grabbing for the wrong brush. Try color coding or writing each child's name on his or her brush to help prevent swapping bacteria. Keep a watchful eye on youngsters during brushing—they don't always have the best hygiene habits and could innocently spread germs.

Trash your toothbrush after being sick

Make sure to replace your toothbrush with a new one so you don't risk getting sick again. If you use an electric toothbrush, just replace the head. Even if you're healthy, the American Dental Association recommends replacing your toothbrush every 3 to 4 months or sooner if the bristles look worn out.⁶

³. New coronavirus stable for hours on surfaces; nih.gov; March 2020. | ⁴ How to clean and disinfect; cdc.gov; March 2020.

⁵. Toothbrush Care; ada.org; 2020. | ⁶. Toothbrushes; ada.org; 2020.

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