

Everyday Life and COVID-19

Naomi Bar-Yam[‡], Derrick Van Gennep^{*†}, Chen Shen[†] and Yaneer Bar-Yam[†]

[‡]Mothers' Milk Bank Northeast, ^{*}Harvard University, [†]New England Complex Systems Institute

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Over the last few months, our lives have changed in many profound ways. A pick-up basketball game, a trip to the grocery store, even walking through the lobby of our apartment building to the elevator are all fraught with potential dangers—the possibility that the forward on the other team, the last customer to squeeze the same orange, or your neighbor that pushed the elevator button are unknowingly COVID-19 positive and passing the virus onto us. This holds for everything they touch and every breath they make in the spaces we share, even momentarily. While close contacts dominate transmission, other dangers should be avoided as well.

Jogging, biking, and FaceTime get-togethers with friends are poor substitutes for that basketball game, but they'll do in a pinch. However, we all have to eat, and, even when we are sheltering in place, we sometimes have to leave our homes. What should be done under these circumstances? We are in a time of great fear, danger, and uncertainty. Here are a few guidelines for making our activities of daily living safer.

APARTMENT BUILDINGS

Homes with shared entrances expose us to everyone else in our building, in the common areas, entryways, hallways, laundry rooms, sometimes even the air we breathe through a common ventilation system.

- Spend as little time as possible in entryways and common areas, even when they are not crowded. The coronavirus sticks around on surfaces and in the air.
- Assume any surface—your mailbox, the doorknob, elevator buttons—is contaminated and can transmit COVID-19. Put something disposable between you and the surface, gloves, a piece of cloth, or even a piece of paper. Be creative.
- When possible, wear a mask*, scarf or bandana when walking in shared spaces. Reusable, washable masks are available, and there are simple instructions available to make your own.
- Once you get to your apartment, wash your hands well before touching anything else (with soap for at least 20 seconds). Carry hand sanitizer with you to clean your hands when you are going out.
- See setting up a receiving area for packages (below).
- Keep windows in your apartment open when weather allows. A HEPA air purifier in your apartment will help with central ventilation systems, or when windows can't be open.
- Assume elevators are contaminated, as there may be many people per day sharing that small space. Avoid sharing elevators with other people. When possible, use the stairs, it's great exercise, to boot, though still not as fun as that pick-up basketball game.

*The use of masks is debated, we note that: (1) Any individual who has even mild symptoms should avoid contact with others and should wear a mask while in necessary public or private contact with others. (2) Wearing a mask should be accepted in public settings to prevent those who are sick from hesitating to or feeling stigmatized by wearing a mask. (3) While masks do not guarantee safety for a healthy individual and their availability may be limited because of higher priority need in medical settings, using masks where proximity to others who may be infected can't be avoided **dramatically** reduces the risk of infection. (4) For those who are over 50 or have preexisting health conditions, as well as for those in areas of heightened risk, the large cost of being infected justifies the use of a mask.

GROCERY SHOPPING/PHARMACY/ OTHER NECESSARY ERRANDS

Obtaining and providing essentials at a time of crisis requires extraordinary attention. Many grocery stores are now offering a number of ways to keep shopping safe for staff and customers. Find and use the stores in your area that take safety seriously and offer some or all of these things.

- Hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes at the entrance, throughout the store and at check out for cashiers and baggers, as well as customers.
- Staff who remind shoppers to keep safe distance apart.
- Staff who use a no-contact digital IR thermometer to check external body temperature, to make sure anybody who enters the store doesn't have symptoms.
- Ordering online to be picked up at curbside, parking lot or home delivery with no contact.
- Extended hours to avoid crowding.
- Early opening with access limited to seniors and other vulnerable customers.
- Limiting the number of people in the store at any one time.
- Some pharmacies will now mail or deliver your prescriptions.
- Customers, store workers, and store managers should be open to communicating with each other to help improve the shopping experience, with an emphasis on the safety of the community.

When deciding whether or not to go shopping:

- Individuals who suspect they might have COVID-19, or exhibit flu-like symptoms, should not go shopping. They should arrange for alternative solutions which do not involve coming in contact with others, if possible.
- Similarly, those who are over 50 or have preexisting health conditions, should arrange for alternative shopping solutions where possible. Otherwise, they should take advantage of early hour restricted shopping where it is provided.
- Alternative shopping solutions include, but are not limited to: online shopping, delivery apps or websites, having a friend or family member shop for you, and asking the store if they have delivery options. Delivery, family, friend or otherwise, should be done no-contact.
- Shopping should be done as infrequently as possible.
- Limit the shopping time. If possible only one member of each household should do the shopping. If the effort is too much for one person, plan the trip carefully so each one has part of the list and the shopping time is as short as possible.

- In order to reduce strain on the supply chain, and to make sure everyone gets the resources they need, we suggest that each individual has two weeks worth of food and goods at any point in time and we strongly discourage buying excessive amounts of any product.

Before going to the store:

- Have a designated set of clothes and shoes that you use when shopping. Before and after shopping, launder or disinfect these clothes thoroughly, and keep them separate from your everyday clothes and shoes.
- Wear gloves and a face mask (or scarf or bandana) which covers your nose and mouth.
- Bring your own designated shopping bags if you have them, disinfect them before and after shopping, and keep the bags away from everyday items. A rolling suitcase is a great alternative to grocery bags when walking long distances is necessary.
- Hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes, soap, or other sanitizing materials should be brought to the store, in case you or others are in need.
- Make a grocery list of essential items, including amounts, before going to the store. If you know the layout of the store organize the list so that you go through the store without doubling back. If possible, include backup items in case the store is out of something specific. A well done list will make it unnecessary to call home as the use of a cell phone in the store is to be avoided.
- If possible, set up a receiving area in your garage, porch or entry area where you can leave non perishable items for 2-3 days, by which time any virus on the surfaces will not be active. If you have to bring them into your home, set up a marked off area for them near the entryway.

Some items to consider adding to your shopping list:

- Where available, N95 respirator masks, or a surgical mask, if respirators are not accessible.
- Disinfectants, including hand sanitizer, hand soap, laundry detergent, and dish soap.
- Gloves, coat, and coverings for shoes
- Medical supplies, including thermometers, cold remedies, and prescription drugs
- Non-perishable food

Transportation:

- Avoid public transportation if at all possible. If it is necessary, take extra precautions—masks (or scarfs or bandanas) and gloves are essential. Passenger cars are helpful not only to decrease exposure but to bringing larger amounts of groceries home.

- Uber/Lyft/Taxis are better options than mass transportation but also have risks—masks and gloves are essential.
- If you do not have a car but have the ability to park one and can afford it, rent a car for the next few weeks.

When you are in the store:

- Social distancing protocols should be followed, including keeping a distance of 6 feet / 2 meters from your nearest neighbor at all times.
- Sanitize your cart or basket before and after using it, and place your shopping bag into it.
- Use gloves and/or plastic produce bags to take items from the shelf into your cart. Since gloves can be contaminated by touching anything in the store, it is best to use both gloves and disposable plastic produce bags where possible.
- Avoid touching anything in the store unless necessary, and take extra care to avoid touching your face.
- Take items from the back of the shelf, where they are less likely to have been handled by multiple customers.
- Checkout should be performed with minimal contact. Using self-checkout and electronic payment is preferable.
- Ask cashiers and baggers to wear gloves or use hand sanitizer while checking out your items.

Arriving home:

- When you get home, place all items in a receiving area where they can be left for 2-3 days (see above).
- Reminder: Wash your hands when you are done.
- For perishable or urgently needed items, wash them with soap and rinse carefully before putting away.
- Upon return from any outing with other people, even if you've maintained safe distancing, place clothing in a bag for laundry, and shower.

PACKAGES AND MAIL

Coronavirus can remain on paper and cardboard for one day. For plastic and other materials, it can remain for 3-4 days, depending on the conditions. Packages have been handled by many people before they arrive at your home.

- If possible, leave the package unopened in your receiving area: garage, porch or some similar area for 2-4 days.
- If it needs to be opened immediately, or you do not have such a space available, wash off the box with soapy water, disinfectant or wipes before opening. Remove the item or items carefully and discard the outside box.
- Reminder: Wash your hands when you are done.