COVID-19 Health Basics

How is COVID-19 transmitted?

SARS-CoV-2 mainly spreads through the air in respiratory droplets or aerosolized particles released when a person with the coronavirus coughs, sneezes, talks, sings or breathes. People can transmit the virus even if they do not have symptoms. Some new SARS-CoV-2 variants spread more easily than the original strain.

SARS-CoV-2 transmission happens most often indoors, especially within households, in institutional settings, such as nursing homes and prisons, and in crowded workplaces and social settings, such as bars. Transmission is uncommon outdoors, though it can occur in crowded settings.

SARS-CoV-2 is not directly sexually transmitted, but intimate contact during sex—such as kissing—can spread the virus. It is not yet clear whether the coronavirus can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy or breastfeeding, but this appears to be rare.

Last Reviewed: September 15, 2023

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.