



UT Health Rio Grande Valley™

How to Be Clear During COVID-19

As we learn more about the coronavirus, new words continue to enter our vocabulary. Below are several terms being used when referring to COVID-19. We wanted to clarify what these unfamiliar terms mean so you and your family can make the right decisions for your health.

UNFAMILIAR TERM	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLE
 Asymptomatic	Doesn't feel sick.	Some people infected with the coronavirus may be asymptomatic, which means they don't feel sick.
 Symptomatic	Feels sick.	Some people infected with the coronavirus may be symptomatic, which means they developed symptoms.
 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.
 Flatten the curve	Slowing the spread of infection, so hospitals and healthcare workers can treat fewer people over time.	Flattening the curve involves taking preventive measures to delay and slow down the spread of COVID-19.
 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.
 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.
 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.
 Outbreak	Many people sick with one illness in one area.	An outbreak may occur in a community or geographical area, or may affect several countries.

 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.
 Self-isolation	The act of isolating or separating oneself or itself from others.	Self-isolation is when you do not leave your home because you have or might have COVID-19.
 Social/physical distancing	Avoiding public spaces and keeping 6 feet of distance between you and other people.	If you need to go to the grocery store or pharmacy, practice physical distancing. Keep 6 feet 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.
 Surgical mask	A surgical mask, also known as a medical face mask, is intended to be worn by health professionals during healthcare procedures.	Disposable face mask worn by health professionals prevent saliva or mucus from coming out or going in.
 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.