

The New York Times

Coronavirus Briefing

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An informed guide to the global outbreak, with the latest developments and expert advice about prevention and treatment.



By [Lara Takenaga](#) and [Jonathan Wolfe](#)

The 5 rules of the pandemic

As cities and countries ease restrictions, public health experts are embracing the idea of “harm reduction” to help people lower their risk of infection while still living a full life. Our Well editor, Tara Parker-Pope, came up with [five rules to guide you in making the best decisions for yourself](#):

- 1. Track your area’s health status.** You want to know the percentage of positive tests in your community or state. When the rate stays at 5 percent or lower for two weeks, there’s most likely enough testing taking place to control the spread of the virus.
- 2. Limit close contacts.** The safest interactions are with members of your household, but if you want to widen your circle, the key is consistency. Consider [forming a “quarantine pod,”](#) in which two or three households agree on safety precautions and socialize only with one another.
- 3. Manage your exposure.** Think of your activities like items on a budget: You’ll have to make trade-offs, balancing higher-risk events and interactions, like a dinner party or a haircut, with lower-risk ones, like grocery shopping.
- 4. Keep riskier activities short.** When making plans, think about how much open space there will be, the number of other people and the amount of time you’re likely to spend. Try to keep indoor events to under an hour, and always wear a mask during close conversations.

5. Don't let your guard down. The advice we've heard time and again still applies: Practice social distancing, wash your hands often, and be extra cautious if you or someone in your circle is at higher risk.

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