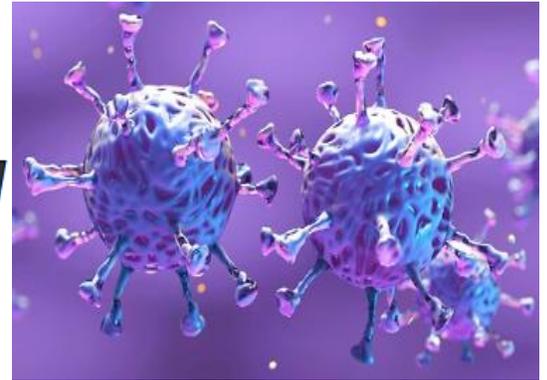


Coronavirus on Fabric: What You Should Know

By Debbie Koenig



WebMD

April 1, 2020 -- Many emergency room workers remove their clothes as soon as they get home -- some before they even enter. Does that mean you should worry about COVID-19 transmission from your own clothing, towels, and other textiles?

While researchers found that the virus can remain on some surfaces for up to 72 hours, the study didn't include fabric. "So far, evidence suggests that it's harder to catch the virus from a soft surface (such as fabric) than it is from frequently touched hard surfaces like elevator buttons or door handles," wrote Lisa Maragakis, MD, senior director of infection prevention at the Johns Hopkins Health System.

One thing experts do know: At this point, transmission happens mostly through close contact, not from touching hard surfaces or clothing. The best thing you can do to protect yourself is to stay home. And if you do go out, practice social distancing.

"This is a very powerful weapon," Robert Redfield, MD, director of the CDC, told National Public Radio. "This virus cannot go from person to person that easily. It needs us to be close. It needs us to be within 6 feet."

And don't forget to use hand sanitizer while you're out, avoid touching your face, and wash your hands when you get home.

If nobody in your home has symptoms of COVID-19 and you're all staying home, the CDC recommends routine cleaning, including laundry. Even if you go out and maintain good social distancing -- at least 6 feet from anyone who's not in your household -- you should be fine.

But if you suspect you got too close for too long, or someone coughed on you, there's no harm in changing your clothing and washing it right away, especially if there are hard surfaces like buttons and zippers where the virus might linger. Wash your hands again after you put everything into the machine. Dry everything on high, since the virus dies at temperatures above 133 F. File these steps under "abundance of caution": They're not necessary, but if it gives you peace of mind, it may be worth it.

Using the Laundromat

Got your own washer and dryer? You can just do your laundry. But for those who share a communal laundry room or visit the laundromat, some extra precautions make sense:

- Consider social distancing. Is your building's laundry room so small that you can't stand 6 feet away from anyone else? Don't enter if someone's already in there. You may want to ask building management to set up a schedule for laundry, to keep everyone safe.
- Sort your laundry before you go, and fold clean laundry at home, to lessen the amount of time you spend there and the number of surfaces you touch, suggests a report in *The New York Times*.
- Bring sanitizing wipes or hand sanitizer with you to wipe down the machines' handles and buttons before you use them. Or, since most laundry spaces have a sink, wash your hands with soap right after loading the machines.
- If you have your own cart, use it. A communal cart shouldn't infect your clothes, but touching it with your hands may transfer the virus to you.
- Don't touch your face while doing laundry. (You should be getting good at this by now.)
- Don't hang out in the laundry room or laundromat while your clothes are in the machines. The less time you spend close to others, the better. Step outside, go back to your apartment, or wait in your car.