



**GOVERNMENT OF
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES**

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PRESS RELEASE

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CDC Redefines COVID-19 Close Contact

St. Croix, US Virgin Islands (October 26, 2020) – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expanded the definition of “close contact.” * to include being within 6 feet of an infected person for several brief encounters throughout the day. “Close contact” is when these short periods (one minute or less) add up to 15 minutes over 24-hours.

- The definition comes from a [CDC report about a Vermont correctional officer**](#) who developed COVID-19 after “close contact” with six prisoners not aware they were COVID-19 positive. These asymptomatic prisoners came from another prison with high COVID-19 rates.
- Surveillance footage shows the officer (always masked) walking within 6 feet of the prisoners (who weren’t always masked) for a total of 15 minutes of “close contact” throughout an 8-hour shift.
- In the weeks before infection, the officer wasn’t near any known infected people. The infection rate of the area surrounding the prison was 20 per 100,000 people.

The CDC also recognizes that [sometimes COVID-19 is spread by airborne transmission***](#). However, it is more likely spread by “close contact” and less likely spread through contaminated surfaces.

- COVID-19 can spread through small droplets and particles that linger in the air for minutes to hours.
- These droplets could infect people more than 6-feet from the infected person, even after that person has left. Stay safe by avoiding respiratory droplets.

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Avoid “Close Contact” and Wear your Mask Properly:

- Remember to keep your distance - at least 6 feet away from others, indoors and outside.
- Germs travel in and out through your nose too. Cover your mouth AND nose with a mask around others who don't live in the same house as you.
- If you have trouble keeping the mask on, try taking a break outside, away from people who don't live with you.

Avoid Airborne Transmission with Air Circulation and Spending Time Outdoors:

- Avoid crowded indoor areas (work break room, crowded stores, waiting rooms). Avoid waiting in air-conditioning buildings and ask others to do the same.
- Open the windows. Enjoy the breeze. Fresh air dramatically reduces exposure to infectious droplets.
- If there is no breeze, create one. Use fans to blow in outdoor air or create a cross-breeze. Install outward facing vents in rooms with no windows.

Avoid Spread Through Contaminated Surfaces:

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces as often as possible: door handles, remote controls, phones, tablets, keyboards, light switches, credit card machines, pens.
- If you don't have an EPA registered disinfectant, use a 70% alcohol solution OR 1/3 cup of bleach mixed with water (use a clean, empty spray bottle, and make a new bleach solution daily)
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds. Get used to the habit by singing the “Happy Birthday Song” twice, or sing your favorite song for 20 seconds.
- When you can't wash your hands, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

For more information on the new CDC guidance:

*“Close contact”: Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html#contact>.

** “COVID-19 in a Correctional Facility Employee Following Multiple Brief Exposures to Persons with COVID-19 — Vermont, July–August 2020.”:

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6943e1.htm?s_cid=mm6943e1_w&fbclid=IwAR2ENr7PB6CG1uW0a6uO0ETv_c4UWsRqwmMwQ78bw8jdFLID92g1z3rDu8M

*** Sometimes COVID-19 spreads through airborne transmission:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>

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