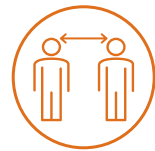




Roommate Guidance

There are many benefits to having roommates in college ranging from social connections, to shared costs, to having someone to wake you up if you sleep through your alarm. However, living with others during COVID-19 presents some unique challenges and considerations, and the safety advice can often be confusing. Here are some tips to help you navigate staying healthy while sharing your living space.

Let's start with the basics. If we all follow this guidance, it allows for us to more safely be around one another.



Keep 6 feet (2 meters) of distance between yourself and others whenever possible.



Wear a cloth mask indoors and in public areas.



Wash your hands well and often. Carry your own hand sanitizer and surface wipes.



Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.



When possible, meet online or outdoors and in larger common areas.

Inside the Residence

- Limit visitors or guests inside your residence.
- Wearing a face covering and social distancing is always recommended when in public, but there may be circumstances in which you should also practice these behaviors within common living spaces, such as your apartment's living room and kitchen or in your residence hall room. For example, if any roommate is unable or chooses not to adhere to social distancing guidelines outside the residence, face coverings should be worn and social distancing implemented within shared spaces inside the residence.
- **Clean and disinfect** frequently touched surfaces and objects daily (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, faucet and cabinet handles, smartphones, laptops, remote controls, etc.).
- If you share a bathroom, remember that sinks could be an infection source. Totes or caddies can be used for personal items so they don't touch the bathroom countertop; bring your tote back to your personal space rather than leaving it in a shared bathroom.
- Each person should use their own hand or face towels.
- If sharing food or drinks, use separate serving dishes or cups (e.g., rather than sticking your hand into a bag of chips, pour an individual portion into a bowl).
- When you are feeling generous and you wash your roommate's dishes or do their laundry, wash your hands thoroughly afterwards.
- Practice basic hygiene, including hand-washing. Wash your hands every time you enter your residence.

Outside the Residence

- Wear a [face covering](#) in public, especially while indoors. This is one of the best ways that everyone can stay safe while interacting with one another. This is required in all campus buildings.
- Practice social distancing outside your residence at all times, especially while indoors. This means keeping at least 6 feet (two arms lengths) between you and others. Social distancing also means avoiding gatherings where people are within 6 feet of each other, and congregating with people at restaurants or bars. **This does not mean you can't see your friends—there are lots of safe ways to do this.** See the FAQ below on socializing with social distancing.
- Wash your hands or use hand-sanitizer often and avoid touching your face.

Special considerations for individuals sharing sleeping spaces (such as a bedroom or residence hall room)

- Arrange beds so that you have as much space between beds as possible. Consider sleeping facing away from one another. Even sleeping in opposite directions (head to toe) could create extra distance.
- If building rules permit, open the window and turn on a fan to bring in and circulate fresh air if possible.
- Avoid bunk beds as they do not allow for proper social distancing. Lofting of beds is ok, particularly if moving desks or other furniture under the bed creates more navigable space.

Special considerations for sorority and fraternity houses and co-ops

- Limit visitors and guests.
- Face coverings should be used in common spaces like the living room or study areas.
- Furniture should be arranged to facilitate social distancing.
- Implement traffic control measures or schedule shifts for when common spaces such as shared bathrooms, eating areas, and laundry rooms can be used. For example, individuals with the first names A-L can do laundry on Monday, Thursday, or Saturday and M-Z the opposite days.

Keep in mind that everyone you will encounter will have a different risk tolerance.

They could have a condition that puts them at higher risk of getting seriously ill with COVID-19 or live with someone who does—so it is important to not make assumptions. People at high risk for severe illness need to follow extra precautions. You can help protect the most vulnerable by wearing your mask, keeping your distance, and washing your hands often.

Roommate Guidance FAQs

Can my friends come over to hang out at my place? How can I socialize while social distancing?

In general, limiting people in your residence to just your roommates decreases the spread. This might seem challenging, but it is totally doable and will limit your close contact exposure to others outside of your household, substantially decreasing the risk that public health officials will ask you to self-quarantine or self-isolate if your friends should ever turn out to have COVID-19.

That being said, there are lots of ways to hang out with your friends while decreasing the likelihood of spreading COVID-19.



- Meeting somewhere outdoors **where you can stay six feet apart**. This could be at:
 - Apartment complex swimming pools
 - Other common outdoor spaces
 - Parks
 - On-campus outdoor spaces
 - Coffee shops with outdoor tables that allow for six feet separation
- Go for a socially distanced walk
 - In the neighborhood
 - On a green belt
- Invest in a cheap lawn chair and explore Austin. There are a tons of parks and green spaces that are perfect for hanging out.
- If you are craving air conditioning, consider indoor common spaces at your apartment complex or on campus that allow for six feet of social distancing.

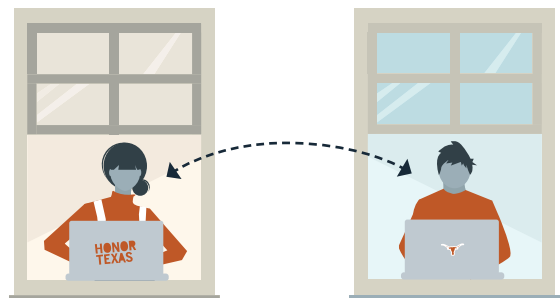
If you choose to have visitors inside your residence, you should practice social distancing and everyone should wear face coverings. Avoid hugs, handshakes, high fives, or any other form of physical contact. With each visitor, you increase your risk of being exposed to or spreading COVID-19.



I feel like my roommate's behavior is putting me at risk. What can I do?

Conflict may arise with roommates for many reasons, including disagreements over safety and cleaning precautions related to COVID-19, having guests in the house, or doing things outside of the home that are not socially distanced. Here are strategies for dealing with a roommate whose behaviors may put you at risk:

- The best approach is to have these conversations before any problems arise. Talk with your roommates about house rules, such as who is allowed in the residence, what social distancing looks like outside of the home, how frequently you will clean and disinfect, etc. **Having a plan before a problem develops can head off these disagreements in the first place.**
- If problems arise, talk to your roommate. Let them know which specific behaviors concern you. To prepare for this conversation, visit CMHC's website for [tips on fighting fair to resolve conflict](#).



- Consult with your RA (if living in a residence hall) or your landlord who may be a source of guidance and support depending on the situation.
- Remember that you ultimately cannot control others' behavior. If your roommate is not behaving in a safe way, take steps to keep yourself safe by limiting contact as much as possible, avoiding shared spaces, wearing a mask and asking them to wear a mask in shared spaces.
- Contact the [University Ombuds Office for advice and assistance](#).

What do I do if someone I live with gets sick?

Students should contact University Health Services if they experience any [symptoms of COVID-19](#) and begin self-isolating immediately, even before being tested. Students who test positive with COVID-19 should continue to self-isolate until it has been at least 10 days from the onset of their symptoms, 72 hours without a fever, and they have experienced a decrease in respiratory symptoms. This [self-assessment tool](#) can help you determine if you need to see a health care provider.



On-campus:

The University will assist you or your roommate in relocating so that the person who is sick can self-isolate. They can also assist with resources for students needing to [self-quarantine](#) (required for individuals who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19).

Off-campus:

The symptomatic person self-isolating should:

- Avoid shared spaces, always remain isolated in a separate room that is not used by anyone else, and use a separate bathroom if possible*
- Wear a cloth face covering if circumstances require them to be around others at home and outside.
- Not share food, dishes, glasses, clothes, or any other household items with others. All items handled by the person self-isolating should be washed or disinfected before being handled by another person.
- Eat in their room, if possible.

If you need to share a bathroom with someone who is sick, the person who is sick should clean and disinfect any touched surfaces in the bathroom after each use. If this is not possible, the person who does the cleaning should:

- Open outside doors and windows before entering and use ventilating fans to increase air circulation in the area.
- Wait as long as possible before entering the room to clean and disinfect or to use the bathroom.
- This situation should be avoided if at all possible.

If it is not possible for the person who is sick to safely self-isolate in your residence, they can access a hotel room designated by the City of Austin for individuals needing to self-isolate until they are no longer contagious. See more information about alternative housing under the FAQ "What if I or my roommate have to self-quarantine or self-isolate but cannot do so in our current accommodations because we share a room or share a bathroom?"

Clean and disinfect the residence. As a [close contact](#), you will be required to [self-quarantine](#) and monitor for symptoms of COVID-19.

I/my roommate has a job. Does that impact what behaviors we should practice at home?

If you or your roommate's job involves close contact with other people in an office, lab, the service industry, etc. and following social distancing guidelines or basic hygiene is not possible on the job, then face coverings should be worn and social distancing should be practiced at home.

Can we host/attend a party or large social gathering?

This one, unfortunately, is a hard no. Many clusters of infected individuals have resulted from parties or social gatherings. It is possible to spread COVID-19 even when an individual has no symptoms. **It won't be like this forever, and the less social gatherings we do now the sooner this pandemic will end.** Follow [Austin Public Health's Risk Based Guidelines](#) regarding the maximum number of participants in a gathering.

My roommate was told to self-quarantine. Does that mean I need to self-quarantine, too?

When someone is told to [self-quarantine](#), it may be because they have been in close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19 or to satisfy a travel requirement. If your roommate is self-quarantining, that does not mean that you must, also; however, you and others sharing the living space should practice social distancing and wear a cloth face covering. You should also monitor for symptoms of COVID-19.



What if I or my roommate have to self-quarantine or self-isolate but cannot do so in our current accommodations because we share a room or share a bathroom?

You or your roommate might need to [self-quarantine](#) at times if you have had close contact with someone with COVID-19 or for other high-risk activities like air travel. You might also need to self-isolate if you have COVID-19 symptoms, are awaiting COVID-19 test results, or because you have been diagnosed with COVID-19. But some living arrangements, such as sharing a bedroom or sharing a bathroom, might make safe self-quarantine or self-isolation impossible. In those circumstances, the City of Austin has designated a hotel where those individuals can safely self-quarantine or self-isolate. These accommodations are free of charge and include high-speed internet, three meals a day, ample parking, and medical oversight (if needed). Simply call Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line (BCCAL) at 512-232-5050, and we can help to make arrangements for you.

