

Covid-19 and Your Car

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COVID-19 is a micron sized virus that attacks the lungs and can be deadly in many people.

In these challenging times of world pandemics, social distancing and travel restrictions, you may be concerned about COVID-19 virus contaminating your car. A virus may enter your vehicle IF you have handled or touched another contaminated surface such as a gas pump filler nozzle, a door handle at a convenience store or gas station entrance, or a public restroom door or faucet handle. A virus may also enter your vehicle if someone who has the virus (knowingly or unknowingly) is inside your vehicle and sneezes or coughs, or their hands are contaminated and they touch surfaces inside or outside your car (interior or exterior door handles, radio or climate control knobs, the glove box or seat belt).

Vehicle contamination is probably NOT much of an issue for you or your family as long as nobody who rides in your vehicle has COVID-19. But it can be a real concern for UBER and LYFT drivers, and taxi drivers who transport random people in their cars.

We've seen a number of YouTube videos posted in recent weeks that describe how to clean and disinfect your car. Some are very informative and some are rather sketchy. The main points in most of these videos are (1) use a product that is EPA approved to kill the coronavirus, and (2) avoid using harsh chemicals (like bleach!) that may fade or damage interior upholstery, plastics and fabrics, and in some cases (3) buy their brand of cleaning products.

Many of the professionally produced videos do contain good advice for Germaphobes. But is all this cleaning and disinfecting really necessary? It depends.

THE RISK OF COVID-19 CONTACT EXPOSURE IN A VEHICLE

If someone who has COVID-19 enters your vehicle and leaves their germs or grubby fingerprints in your car, there may be a risk of exposure for you or future passengers. However, the COVID-19 virus does NOT survive long outside the human body. So unless you touch a contaminated surface within minutes or a few hours at most after it was contaminated, and then almost immediately touch your nose, eyes, mouth or ears with dirty fingers, the chance of contracting COVID-19 via this type of transmission is extremely low. The greater risk of exposure and catching COVID-19 is breathing the same air as a passenger who has COVID-19 in the small confined space inside your vehicle.

If you do not have COVID-19, and you are the only person who drives your vehicle, don't worry. There is ZERO risk of exposure in your vehicle. Ditto if your vehicle is only used to transport yourself and your family members as long as none of your passengers have COVID-19 or have been exposed to someone else who might be sick or a carrier of the disease. There is no need to wear gloves, a face mask or respirator when driving your car. Save the gloves and face mask or respirator for visits to high traffic stores or locations where a lot of people are coming and going.

COVID-19 FACTS AND FICTION

COVID-19, like any other virus, needs a dark moist environment (like that inside a human body) to survive and remain viable. Lab tests have shown that it does NOT survive long outside a human being. Various studies have shown that most contagious viruses die within minutes outside the body, although some may persist for several hours. Some lab reports have shown that COVID-19 may (and we emphasize the word "may") survive as long as 1 to 3 days on some hard plastic or metal surfaces. This would include car door handles, steering wheels, dash buttons, turn signal levers, gear shift handles, even seat belts and cup holders. The question is even if the virus can survive that long on some surfaces, is there enough virus left to actually infect somebody? That's something no one has been able to prove one way or the other (yet).

The important point to keep in mind is most viruses don't survive long outside the human body, only minutes to a few hours. Some airborne virus particles can persist for several hours IF they are in tiny droplets of moisture (a sneeze, for example). Thus, airborne transmission is a far greater risk than contact transmission of the virus. You need to be really close to someone who has the virus to catch it (within 6 feet of someone for 10 minutes or longer). Or, you have to be inside a room or confined area where air circulation is limited and everyone is breathing the same air (such as inside an airplane, train, bus, car, school room, meeting room, social gathering or family gathering indoors, etc.).

Direct sunlight kills viruses in minutes. Even the toughest viruses won't survive for more than 30 to 45 minutes in sunlight. Ultraviolet light C (UVC spectrum) kills the bugs. Sunlight is nature's way of disinfecting the great outdoors.

SUNLIGHT KILLS COVID-19

Rather than spend a lot of time cleaning and disinfecting your car with chemical products that may be toxic or might damage interior fabrics, just park your vehicle outside for an hour in direct sunlight. Let

nature disinfect it for you.

TIME ALSO NEUTRALIZES COVID-19

Or, just park your car for 2 to 3 days. Any virus that may have been present in your vehicle will have died the next time you need to drive your car. And we are all supposed to be avoiding unnecessary travel, right?



Viruses may be on ANY surface inside your vehicle that has been touched.

SURFACES TO DISINFECT ON YOUR CAR:

If you suspect someone with COVID-19 may have been in your car, or that you may have come into contact with a contaminated surface somewhere, and you can't just park your vehicle to allow any COVID-19 virus to expire on its own, here are the surfaces you should disinfect with a suitable chemical or wipe:

Surfaces to clean:

Interior and exterior door handles (front and back)

Power window buttons (front and back)

Power lock buttons

Steering wheel (the rim and all control buttons)

Turn signal stalk

Gear shift handle

All control buttons on the radio and climate control system

Power seat buttons

Seat belts and clasps

Seat surfaces

Cup holders and center console

Glove box (if recently opened)

Your keys or key fob



If you came into contact with COVID-19 before you got into your car, your key fob may also be contaminated. Be sure to clean it too!

Also clean your smart phone if it was used during your most recent trip

Power mirrors adjuster buttons and interior mirror (if recently adjusted)

Trunk release inside or outside (if you opened/closed the trunk or rear hatch)

Gas cap (if recently used)

WATCH OUT FOR DIRTY GAS PUMP HANDLES AND BUTTONS

Gas station pumps are one of the dirtiest objects any driver will come into contact with. Everybody who fills up touches the pump handle and buttons, and few if any service stations ever clean the pump handles or buttons. The best advice is to wear gloves or use a paper towel when touching the pump handle and buttons.



CHANGE YOUR CABIN AIR FILTER

Most newer vehicles are factory-equipped with a CABIN AIR FILTER that helps clean air entering your vehicle. The filter can also clean air recirculating inside your vehicle as it recirculates through the Climate Control system. A cabin air filter can trap virus sized particles when your climate control system is set on RECIRC. It may not add a lot of protection, but it can help reduce the amount of airborne dust and virus particles that may be floating around inside your vehicle. Opening the windows to blow out stale air also helps reduce your risk of exposure.



The Cabin Air Filter is usually located behind the glovebox or in the cowl area compartment at the base of the windshield.

Stay Well!

We all need to use caution and social distancing to avoid catching the COVID-19 virus, but we don't have to become Germaphobes or live in fear of catching this pandemic disease. Use common sense, protect yourself and your passengers in situations where there is a real risk of COVID-19 contamination (planes, trains, buses, crowded confined rooms, etc.), and stay well!

TWO MORE WAYS TO FIGHT COVID-19

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, many states are requiring people to "shelter in place" or "work from home." But we still have to go to the grocery store, and many people (like Amazon warehouse employees) still have to go to work, increasing their risk of exposure to the virus.

One way to reduce the presence of airborne COVID-19 in any indoor work environment is to install some **HEPA AIR FILTER MACHINES**. The primary means of COVID-19 transmission appears to be tiny aerosol particles that may circulate for up to 3 hours in indoor air. A HEPA filter is 99.97 percent efficient down to 0.3 microns which will trap many (but not all) airborne COVID-19 virus particles. The COVID-19 virus is really tiny, about 60 to 140 nanometers (0.06 to 0.14 microns). By comparison, a N95 face mask is 95 percent efficient at trapping particles down to 0.3 microns.

A good quality portable HEPA Air Filter Machine that has airflow capacity to treat a 12x16 sized room can be purchased online for less than \$200. Larger more expensive commercial grade machines with higher airflow ratings are available for larger rooms. Several of these machines placed in an office, repair shop, small store or other enclosed area could significantly reduce the risk of airborne COVID-19 exposure.

Another way to fight COVID-19 that is floating around in the air or on hard surfaces is zap it with

Ultraviolet light (UV). You can do this by installing several **SUNLAMPS**. The UV-B and UV-C wavelengths of ultraviolet light attack the DNA inside a virus, and will disable most viruses after 20 to 30 minutes of exposure depending on the intensity of the lamp. Noon day natural sunlight does the same thing. You don't want to expose the people indoors to too much UV light, so the lamps should only be turned on before work, during breaks and after work to sterilize the environment.

Related Articles and Resources:

[Change Your Cabin Air Filter](#)

[Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions \(American Medical Assn.\)](#)