

## Caution Recommended When Using Public Bathrooms

A recent study from China has indicated that COVID-19 has been found in the feces of some infected people. The study involved 73 patients that were hospitalized for COVID-19 in early February and had their feces tested for the presence of the 2019-nCoV virus. Feces from 39 of the patients tested positive for the virus even after swabs from the nose and throat of those patients tested negative. The results raise concerns that the virus can also be spread through the digestive tract.

The study further states that diarrhea occurs in 10 to 20 percent of patients that contract the disease. While researchers have extensively warned about the potential for COVID-19 to be transmitted through respiratory aerosols of infected patients (coughing, sneezing, speaking), transmission through aerosolized feces may be a less apparent source of transmission.



While direct transmission from the feces of an infected person is not likely, concerns have been raised that transmission may be possible from the aerosols produced from toilet flushing. It has long been known that toilets produce aerosol “plumes” when flushed that have the potential to spread disease. Those aerosols can linger in the air and contaminate surfaces in bathrooms.

Researchers are recommending that people close toilet seat lids prior to flushing in order to reduce the volume of aerosols that are generated by a toilet flush by 80 percent. However, the plumbing codes in North America do not require most toilets in public bathrooms to have toilet seat lids.

It’s extremely important to know that there is no evidence that COVID-19 has been spread through toilet plumes. However, the findings indicate another reason for anyone who may start to feel ill, even if their symptoms involve gastrointestinal problems as opposed to the more typical respiratory symptoms, to go home immediately and avoid using public bathrooms if possible. In addition, patients that have contracted COVID-19 and are recovering at home are advised to clean and disinfect their bathrooms often, even after symptoms subside.

Some public bathrooms, especially smaller bathrooms, have toilets seats with lids. When using a public toilet that has a seat lid, close the lid prior to flushing. As always, avoiding contact with surfaces in public bathrooms, especially faucet handles, paper towel dispensers and door handles, and careful handwashing practices are essential to reduce the risks of contracting and spreading COVID-19 and other illnesses.

### References:

*Lifting the lid on toilet plume aerosol: a literature review with suggestions for future research.*

Authors: Johnson-DL; Mead-KR; Lynch-RA; Hirst-DVL

Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ajic.2012.04.330>

*COVID-19: Gastrointestinal manifestations and potential fecal-oral transmission.*

Authors: Jinyang Gu, Shanghai Jiaotong University School of Medicine Xinhua Hospital, China, et al. [www.gastrojournal.org/article/ ... \(20\)30281-X/fulltext](http://www.gastrojournal.org/article/... (20)30281-X/fulltext)