

One of the most common questions I have been asked by students and colleagues lately is “Why, if Coronavirus is a respiratory virus, am I supposed to wash my hands so much and not touch my face? I thought people got infected with Coronavirus by inhaling it, like the flu.” It is true that you could be infected by inhaling Coronavirus, but Coronaviruses are relatively large viruses and tend to attach to droplets from sneezes and coughs. The Coronavirus/droplet particles tend to settle out of the air onto surfaces like desktops, counters, chairs, door handles, and even computer keyboards. (The smaller influenza virus generally stays suspended in air longer). If you were to touch a contaminated surface and then touch your eyes and nose in particular, you would infect yourself with Coronavirus. This self-transfer is actually one of the most common routes of infection for any Coronavirus, from Covid19 to a “common cold” Coronavirus. That Coronaviruses attach to droplets from sneezes and coughs is also a really good reason to use tissues to cover mouths and noses when coughing and sneezing or to do the Vampire Sneeze/Cough (into the crook of your elbow). Those efforts will also help to reduce the amount of Coronavirus that might contaminate surfaces. Coronaviruses generally can persist in an infectious form for several hours on a surface. The lipid membrane (the “envelope”) and proteins that coat the virus particle are sensitive to drying and will eventually become degraded. But, it is always good practice to clean all hard surfaces frequently during an outbreak such as this one or during cold and flu season.