



## Coronavirus Messaging Guide and Resources

The Office of Strategic Communication has created this style guide to assist campus when communicating about the coronavirus. If you have any additions, please email [joseph-sherlock@uiowa.edu](mailto:joseph-sherlock@uiowa.edu).

### The basics

Referring to the disease:

- Coronavirus 2019
- COVID-19

Referring to the virus that causes the disease:

- SARS-CoV-2
- The COVID-19 virus
- The coronavirus (not simply “coronavirus”)

### The rationale

The University of Iowa follows Associated Press (AP) editorial style unless specific university needs supersede AP’s guidelines. You can read Iowa’s in-house style guide [here](#).

For now, AP is using “COVID-19” (which stands for “coronavirus disease 2019”) to refer to the current pandemic. The virus that causes the disease COVID-19 is called SARS-CoV-2.

It is important to distinguish between the disease and the virus that causes the disease—they are two different things, COVID-19 and the virus behind COVID-19. Therefore, when referring to the virus specifically, write “SARS-CoV-2,” “the virus that causes COVID-19,” or “the COVID-19 virus.” When referring to the pandemic in general, COVID-19 is acceptable.

Though there are many coronaviruses, most people will understand that you are referring to SARS-CoV-2 when you write “the coronavirus,” so this is also an acceptable shorthand. Unless writing a headline in which space is at a premium, always include “the” when referring to “the coronavirus” as a noun.

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## Glossary of terms

### A

**Anti-.** “Hyphenate most, but don’t hyphenate words that have specific means of their own. For example: antibiotic, antibody, antidote, antiseptic.” [AP]

**Asynchronous (course).** A course comprising recorded instruction and other online materials that participants can interact with on their own time. [UI]

## B

**Blended course.** A course that has components of both synchronous and asynchronous modalities, i.e., some components of the class take place at scheduled times, whereas others can be completed at participants' convenience. When choosing between the terms "blended course" or "hybrid course" in general reference to classes that mix their instructional mode, Iowa favors "blended course." [UI]

## C

**Cancel, canceled, canceling, cancellation** [AP]

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).** "Located in Atlanta, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. On first reference, use Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Precede with national, federal or U.S. if needed for clarity. CDC is acceptable on second reference and takes a singular verb." [AP]

**(The) coronavirus.** Though there are many coronaviruses, most people will understand that you are referring to SARS-CoV-2 when you write "the coronavirus," so this is an acceptable shorthand. Unless writing a headline in which space is at a premium, always include "the" when referring to "the coronavirus" as a noun. [AP, UI]

**COVID-19.** For the foreseeable future, the AP is using "COVID-19" (which stands for "coronavirus disease 2019") to refer to the current pandemic. [AP, UI]

## D

**Data.** The word takes a plural verb: "Data are." However, "this data point indicates." [UI]

**Death, die.** "Don't use euphemisms like passed on or passed away except in a direct quote." [AP]

**Decrease the spread of COVID-19; decrease exposure to COVID-19.** Use this phrase to describe the measures UI is taking to mitigate the virus.

**Diseases.** "Do not capitalize diseases such as cancer, emphysema, leukemia, hepatitis, etc. When a disease is known by the name of a person or geographical area identified with it, capitalize only the proper noun element: Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, Ebola virus, etc." [AP]

Avoid such expressions as: He is battling cancer. She is a stroke victim. Use neutral, precise descriptions: He has stomach cancer. She had a stroke.

## E

**Epidemic, pandemic.** "An epidemic is the rapid spreading of disease in a certain population or region; a pandemic is an epidemic that has spread worldwide. Use sparingly; follow declarations of public health officials. As of March 3, the COVID-19 outbreak had not been declared a pandemic." [AP]

## F

**Face covering.** Use this term to describe a disposable or cloth face mask or a face shield.

## H

**Hand-washing** [AP]

**Health care.** Two words, unhyphenated in all cases. [UI]

**High-touch surfaces.** Though the CDC does not hyphenate this term, the AP, which Iowa follows for editorial guidance, recommends hyphenating. [AP]

**Hybrid course.** A course that incorporates in-person, face-to-face instruction with synchronous and/or asynchronous online instruction. When choosing between the terms “blended course” or “hybrid course” in general reference to classes that mix their instructional mode, Iowa favors “blended course.” [UI]

## I

**Incubation period.** “Time between infection and the appearance of signs or symptoms of an illness. The incubation period for the new virus is thought to be up to two weeks.” [AP]

**Isolation.** “Separating sick people from healthy people to prevent spread of disease. For example, people with the infection are put in isolation in hospitals.” [AP]

## J

**Johnson County Department of Public Health**

## N

**National Institutes of Health (NIH).** “This agency within the Department of Health and Human Services is the principal biomedical research arm of the federal government. NIH is acceptable on second reference.” [AP]

## O

**Outbreak.** “A sudden rise in cases of a disease in a particular place. For disease references, reserve for larger numbers of an illness, not a few cases.” [AP]

## P

**Pandemic.** “An epidemic is the rapid spreading of disease in a certain population or region; a pandemic is an epidemic that has spread worldwide. Use sparingly; follow declarations of public health officials. As of March 3, the COVID-19 outbreak had not been declared a pandemic.” [AP]

**Protective equipment.** The UI uses the phrase protective equipment, not personal protective equipment (PPE).

PPE is equipment such as gloves, safety glasses, and respirators worn by an individual to minimize exposure to hazards that can cause injuries and illnesses; PPE protects the individual wearing the equipment. PPE is addressed in various Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards which include an employer’s responsibilities for providing PPE and ensuring its proper use.

Face coverings may slow the spread of the coronavirus and help people who may unknowingly have the virus from transmitting it to others. Face coverings may not protect the wearer but may keep the wearer from spreading the virus to others.

Therefore, referring to face coverings as PPE is inaccurate and the UI uses the phrase “protective equipment.” [UI]

**Physical distancing.** Though the CDC uses “social distancing” and “physical distancing” interchangeably, Iowa only uses the term “social distancing” for the sake of simplicity and consistency across communications. (See the social-distancing entry below.)

**Plexiglass.** Unhyphenated, generally lowercase. Capitalized if referring to the specific product Plexiglass, lowercase if referring to any other version of the material or analogue: “A plexiglass face shield.” [AP]

**Protective equipment.** Face coverings may slow the spread of the coronavirus and help people who may unknowingly have the virus from transmitting it to others. Face coverings may not protect the wearer but may keep the wearer from spreading the virus to others. Therefore, referring to face coverings as PPE is inaccurate and the UI uses the phrase “protective equipment.” [UI]

## Q

**Quarantine.** “Restricting movement of healthy people who may have been exposed to an infection to see if they become ill. For example, the passengers on the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan were quarantined.” [AP]

## R

**Risk.** “Relative risk is the risk of something happening to one group compared with the risk of it happening to another. This is often expressed in a fraction or ratio in scientific studies. If there is no difference, the ratio is 1. For example, if a study finds that the relative risk of a group of smokers getting a disease is 1.5 compared with a group of nonsmokers, it means the smokers are 1.5 times — or 50% — more likely to develop the disease. But it doesn’t say how likely it is that either group gets the disease. For that, you need absolute risk.

“Absolute risk is the risk of something happening at all. For example, the nonsmoking group in the above example may have had a 4 in 100 chance of getting the disease, while the smokers had a 6 in 100 chance of getting a disease. Another example: A drug that extends life by 50% (a relative risk) sounds impressive, but that might mean living six months on average on a treatment versus four months without. Readers deserve both views of the results.” [AP]

## S

**SARS-CoV-2.** The virus that causes the disease COVID-19 is called SARS-CoV-2. Therefore, when referring to the virus specifically, write “SARS-CoV-2,” “the virus that causes COVID-19,” or “the COVID-19 virus.” Referring to the pathogen as “the coronavirus” is also acceptable because, though there are many types of coronavirus, the reader will know to which you are referring, given widespread awareness of SARS-CoV-2. When referring to the pandemic in general, COVID-19 is acceptable. [AP, UI]

**Social distancing.** From the CDC: “Social distancing, also called ‘physical distancing,’ means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. To practice social or physical distancing:

- Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms’ length) from other people
- Do not gather in groups
- Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings

“In addition to everyday steps to prevent COVID-19, keeping space between you and others is one of the best tools we have to avoid being exposed to this virus and slowing its spread locally and across the country and world.

“Limit close contact with others outside your household in indoor and outdoor spaces. Since people can spread the virus before they know they are sick, it is important to stay away from others when possible, even if you—or they—have no symptoms. Social distancing is especially important for people who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.” [CDC]

Note that Iowa is only using the term “social distancing” for the sake of consistency. [UI]

**Synchronous course.** A course that utilizes real-time instruction at specified date, time, and location. [UI]

## **U**

**University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics**

## **W**

**World Health Organization (WHO).** “The specialized health agency of the United Nations and is based in Geneva. It sets internationally accepted guidelines for treating diseases and coordinates responses to disease outbreaks globally. WHO is acceptable on second reference and takes a singular verb.” [AP]

*Updated: July 9, 2020*