GAS PUMPS IN TIMES OF COVID-19

Like door handles, grocery carts and ATMs, many people touch gas pumps throughout the day. The chance of COVID-19 exposure at the gas pump is low, especially if Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommended practices are followed. These include using disinfecting wipes before touching a pump followed by hand sanitizer, hand-washing and not touching your face after pumping fuel. We've compiled helpful information and frequently asked questions to help everyone protect themselves during these uncertain times.

How could the virus end up on a gas pump handle or buttons?

There are two main ways this could happen.

1. The virus can be transmitted through contact. If an infected person who is still capable of transmitting the virus touches the pump, they can leave it behind.
2. The virus can be transmitted if an infected person sneezes or coughs and droplets land on the pump, there is a possibility that the virus could be left behind. Research shows that the virus can survive on plastic for 72 hours and stainless steel for 48 hours. [1] [2]

How could COVID-19 spread from a handle or button to a person?

While it has been reported that the virus can survive for up to three days on some surfaces, several events would need to occur for it to pass from the pump to a person.

1. First, someone who has COVID-19, with or without symptoms, would have to transmit the virus by coughing, talking, laughing or sneezing within 6-feet of a pump or by touching it with contaminated hands.
2. Next, the virus would have to survive on the pump handle or button.
3. Then a healthy non-COVID-19 individual would have to touch the contaminated surface in such a way that the virus is transferred to their hands.
4. Finally, the healthy individual would then have to touch their eyes, nose or mouth.

Another proposed method would be through secondary aerosolization.[3] Whereby the virus becomes airborne again and can be inhaled.

Should consumers avoid getting gas during the pandemic?

The risk of contracting COVID-19 from a gas pump is low, especially if Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended practices are followed.

1. Use disinfecting wipes on handles and buttons before you touch them (if available).
2. After fueling, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds when you get home or somewhere with soap and water. [4]

In the absence of disinfecting wipes, be creative. Some suggestions include using gloves, paper towels available at the gas pump, a plastic shopping bag or a dog waste bag as a barrier between your hand and the gas pump handle. Properly dispose of the paper towel or bag afterwards and make sure to wash your hands per CDC recommendations.

Consider other touchpoints at a gas station. Be mindful of transferring the virus to your automobile's gas cap or "pop-open" fuel door. Also, as when you've entered other public spaces, wipe and regularly disinfect other interior contact surfaces, such as the door handle, steering wheel, seat belt, gear shift, purse, wallet, and console features.

Are there any known instances of COVID-19 being spread through contact with a gas pump handle or buttons?

At this time, we are not aware of any studies that support the claim that the virus can be transmitted via contact with a gas pump. However, the level of risk associated with contracting the virus from a gas pump is no different than the risk associated with touching other common surfaces like grocery store carts or door handles. CDC and public health professionals recommend disinfecting any potentially contaminated surface and using good hygienic practices, like hand washing, to avoid the spread of the virus.

Surface to surface transmission is not thought to be the primary way that the virus is being transmitted. This does not mean that it is not possible, but that the risk appears to be lower than person to person transmission.

Sources:
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2. Chin, A., Chu, J., Perera, M., Hui, K., Yen, H. L., Chan, M., ... & Poon, L. (2020). Stability of SARS-CoV-2 in different environmental conditions. medRxiv.
3. "Secondary aerosolization can occur for any virus, predominantly when air displacements or movements around contaminated surfaces or fluids disperse the viruses into the air." Piecková, E. (2017). Indoor microbial aerosol and its health effects: Microbial exposure in public buildings -viruses, bacteria, and fungi. In Exposure to Microbiological Agents in Indoor and Occupational Environments (pp. 237-252). Springer, Cham.
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