

The Expat Russian Language Guide to Coronavirus

The Word's Worth

[Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth](#)

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Psst. I gotta a shipment of masks. For you - 1,000 rubles. Like new. **Sergei Fadeechev / TASS**

Embed:

Коронавирус: coronavirus

Turn on the TV: коронавирус (coronavirus). Talk to your neighbors: коронавирус. Check out social media: коронавирус и конспирология (and conspiracy theories). Коронавирус is everywhere! What's a germaphobe hypochondriac to do?

It seems like a good time to do the Expat's Russian Language Guide to Coronavirus.

My qualifications? None. But I read a lot and my mother was a nurse.

1. Без паники! (Don't panic!) That's the worst thing you can do. It raises your susceptibility to disease (I just made that up). Besides, it really, really annoys everyone around you, who are panicking too and want all the attention. If you flip out at the first sign of a cold, you ought to own up, so people know how to handle you. Я, признаюсь, паникёр(ша) (I admit it — I panic.)
2. Не надо покупать медицинскую маску! (You don't have to buy a medical mask!) And besides: they sold out a month ago.
3. Надо купить антисептик для рук (Buy antiseptic for your hands), also called антибактериальный гель для рук (antibacterial gel for hands). But if you can't remember that, just put on your best Russian accent and ask for санитайзер (sanitizer), which is actually a word in the Russian dictionary. Be sure that the sanitizer contains спирт (alcohol), the more the better. If there is more than 60 percent alcohol, "он эффективен и уничтожает разные бактерии и вирусы" (it is effective at killing a variety of bacteria and viruses.) But don't get your hopes up. We weren't born yesterday over here in Russia. No sirree. Информация про 99,9% убитых микробов, указанная на большинстве флаконов с антибактериальным средством — это всего лишь рекламный ход (Information on most bottles of antibacterial liquid that they kill 99.9 percent of microbes is just an advertising ploy.)
4. Тщательно мойте руки (thoroughly wash your hands) and не трогайте лицо, особенно нос, глаза и рот (don't touch your face, especially your nose, eyes and mouth). Key words: тщательно (thoroughly, and we mean really thoroughly) and не трогайте (don't touch). To be on the safe side, try not to touch anything outside your home.
5. Из соображений безопасности воздерживаться от рукопожатий, объятий и тем более поцелуев при встрече (To be on the safe side, refrain from shaking hands, hugging, or especially kissing someone when you meet them.) Rumor has it that kissing has been outlawed in Italy, and that throughout Europe people are knocking elbows in greeting. I do not entirely believe this, but I condone a friendly butt-bump.
6. Не ешьте еду (орешки, чипсы, печенье и другие снеки) из общих упаковок или посуды, если другие люди погружали в них свои пальцы (Do not eat food, such as nuts, chips, cookies and other snacks, from common bags or dishes if other people have stuck their fingers in.) That's right. The worst thing known to humankind: Пить без закусок (drink without an appetizer). Or buy your own individual packets of снеки (isn't that word just adorable?) and don't share them with anyone.
7. Будьте особенно осторожны, когда находитесь в людных местах, аэропортах и других системах общественного транспорта (Be particularly careful when you are in populated places, airports and other public transportation systems.) Try not to breathe. If you must, breathe out, not in. Or, in the words of my scuba diving instructor when I was running out of air: дышите через раз (breathe every other time). In a crowded metro or bus, do an imitation of a giant banana in human clothing. Stare into the middle distance to avoid eye contact with potential virus-carriers.
8. На работе регулярно очищайте поверхности и устройства, к которым вы прикасаетесь (клавиатура компьютера, панели оргтехники общего использования, экран смартфона, пульта, дверные ручки и поручни) (At work regularly clean the surface of the devices you touch — computer keyboard, control

panels on office machines used by the entire staff, smartphone screens, remotes, wooden door handles and railings.) Better yet: Open up the utility cupboard and get out all the cleaning supplies and take turns cleaning with other employees. Consider dividing the day into shifts. Bring a ratty lab coat and sneakers without laces to wear while cleaning. Begin to call your colleagues Молодой человек! Девушка! (Young man! Girl!) in tones of exasperated fury while pointing to a dropped Kleenex or smudge of mud on the floor.

9. Не посещайте рынки, где продают морепродукты, или место, где присутствуют животные (Do not go to any markets selling seafood or any place where there are animals). Since that describes virtually every place Russians shop or walk or pass through, consider trying a home delivery service.
10. Ознакомьтесь с симптомами коронавируса (Learn the coronavirus symptoms.) They are simple: Чувство усталости (fatigue); затруднённое дыхание (difficulty in breathing); высокая температура (high temperature) and кашель и / или боль в горле (cough and/or throat pain). The problem is that are the same symptoms of virtually every other cold or flu you might have. Remember #1: Без паники!
11. Насморк есть? Ура! Радуетесь! (Do you have a runny nose? Hurrah! Celebrate!) A runny or stuffed up nose is not a coronavirus symptom. You have a boring old cold. Go home and watch TV while eating снеки.
12. Если вы подозреваете, что у вас есть коронавирус, позвоните 103. (If you suspect you have contracted coronavirus, call 103.) This is the right thing to do. Really. So do it. And then prepare to stay at home for 14 days with the local cops checking cameras to make sure you have not left your apartment, overworked medical personnel calling to ask about your temperature, and possibly — не дай Бог! (God forbid!) — an army of humans of undiscernible gender under three layers of hazmat suiting showing up to take you somewhere safe.

Now don't get me wrong. I don't mean to be flip. I do see how dangerous this virus is. But when you read instructions for avoiding it that no human being could possibly follow, you could go mad. My advice? Sing a long song while washing your hands. Give a smile instead of a handshake. And most important: Без паники! It's bad for your health.

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