

Neighbors Not Practicing Social Distancing? Here's What to Do

April 22, 2020

The C.D.C. has issued guidelines for the public to wear masks when outside one's home and to practice social distancing — remaining at least six feet away from those outside your household. All of this is with the goal of preventing community spread of coronavirus. But these guidelines are not laws. The level to which people follow them — or even flout them — has varied.

That's creating tension between those who think they're already doing the right thing on social distancing and those who think they are not. (Not to mention those who just don't care about the recommendations.)

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If someone is putting you at risk, such as by ignoring six-foot markers while waiting in line to pay at a grocery store, speak up.

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You can also make changes if you feel an environment is not safe for you. "I can control my own behavior more than I can control others' behavior," said Bethany Teachman, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Virginia. For example, she recently went into a grocery store where the employees were not wearing masks. She first spoke to the manager and thanked the store for providing a community service. "At the same time, I wanted them to know I was uncomfortable that the staff wasn't wearing masks," she said. She has decided she won't go back unless she calls ahead and she confirms they are using masks.

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