

2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. This is a new virus that hasn't caused illness in humans before.

Has COVID-19 spread to the U.S.?

There are cases of COVID-19 in the US. This is an evolving global situation. Still, the immediate health risk from this virus to the general public is considered low at this time. Those at increased risk include people who have traveled to affected areas, healthcare workers who treat people infected with the virus, and those who live in communities where community spread has been reported.

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is spread just like colds or flu through:

- Coughing and sneezing, which creates respiratory droplets
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it and then touching your eyes, nose and mouth

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- Fever
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- In more severe cases, pneumonia (infection in the lungs)

What should I do if I think I am sick with COVID-19?

If you have traveled to an area of concern or were in contact with someone with COVID-19, and you become sick with fever, cough or have difficulty breathing, seek medical care right away.

Follow these steps:

- Call your doctor or emergency room **BEFORE** you go to the facility
- Tell them about recent travel and close contacts (such as people in your household)
- Wear a mask, if one is available

Could COVID-19 get worse?

Experts say in the coming week and months, we can expect to see more cases in the U.S. and worldwide. Community “spread” is how the common cold and flu are transmitted - meaning people catch it from each other while going about their daily lives. Cases of community spread are becoming more common in the United States, especially in the Pacific Northwest. Most importantly, hand-washing and good standard hygiene practices are still the key to preventing spread.

Who is at risk right now?

Currently, the greatest risk of infection is for people who:

- Recently traveled to an area of concern
- Have close, personal contact with those recent travelers
- Have close, personal contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19
- Care for people with COVID-19
- Have a pre-existing medical condition (cancer, diabetes, heart disease, or other condition impacting the ability of the body’s immune system to fight germs)

Should I cancel travel plans abroad?

Currently, the CDC is warning travelers to avoid all [nonessential travel to China, Iran, South Korea and Italy](#). They also advise people who are elderly and those with chronic medical conditions to avoid nonessential travel to Japan. As more countries report community spread of COVID-19, the number of countries added to the travel advisory list may increase.

If someone has COVID-19, what will happen to them?

The vast majority of people recover from this infection. Many people will have only mild or moderate symptoms. Some people may be advised to recover at home and isolate themselves from others. These individuals should call their healthcare provider if their symptoms get worse. Some COVID-19 infections can lead to serious illness, and in some cases death. If someone develops a more serious illness from COVID-19, they may be admitted to the hospital.

Should I wear a face mask when I go out in public?

Currently, the CDC does not recommend the general public use face masks. Instead, they recommend following everyday preventative actions, such as frequent hand-washing, covering your cough, avoiding close contact with those who appear sick, and seeking medical help if you become ill.

What can I do to protect myself and others?

Take everyday preventative actions that are always recommended to slow the spread of respiratory illnesses like colds and flu:

- Stay at home when you are sick
- Cover your coughs and sneezes by using a tissue and then throwing it in the trash. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow. Do not use your hands
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Clean frequently touched surfaces daily (use soap & water or any disinfectant that says "EPA approved" for killing bacteria and viruses)
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick

Is there a vaccine or medicine I can get for COVID-19?

Not yet, because COVID-19 is a new disease. Experts are at work developing a vaccine, but it must be tested to make certain it is safe and effective. There is also no specific medicine currently available to cure COVID-19. People who have COVID-19 should seek medical care to help lessen the severity of symptoms.

How can I be more prepared for COVID-19?

- Have an adequate supply of non-prescription drugs and other health supplies on hand. This could include pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fluid with electrolytes, and vitamins.
- Check your regular prescription drugs to make sure you have an adequate supply; refill your prescriptions if needed.
- Have a thermometer, tissues and hand sanitizer.
- Have a two-week supply of water and food available at home.

Is there anything else I should know?

Stay informed and seek information from reliable, official sources. Be wary of myths, rumors and misinformation circulating online and elsewhere. Health information shared through social media is frequently inaccurate, unless coming from an official, reliable source, such as the [Health Department](#), [Maryland Department of Health](#) or the [CDC](#).