



## 2019-nCoV: Frequently Asked Questions

FAQs are being updated as new information becomes available. Please see the [2019-nCoV FAQs](#) and [Member Q&A](#) for the latest information.

### What are coronaviruses?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some of which can infect people. Some cause mostly mild illness, such as the strains responsible for some common colds. Others can potentially also lead to severe, or even fatal, disease - such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), which continues to circulate in some parts of the world. The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak was caused by a coronavirus. It caused severe and fatal disease, however, is no longer in circulation. The natural reservoir for coronaviruses is thought to be animal hosts. New strains emerge from this reservoir, infect an 'intermediate' host, and from there infect people. The viruses may then be capable of being transmitted from one person to another. Some are efficient at human-to-human transmission, while others are not.

### What does "novel" mean?

Novel means new. In this case, the 2019-novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is a previously-identified strain of coronavirus. It is responsible for the outbreak of pneumonia which began in Wuhan, China in December 2019.

### What are the symptoms of 2019-nCoV?

The illness is still being studied. So far, we know that common symptoms include fever, cough, shortness of breath and difficulty breathing. These symptoms are not limited to 2019-nCoV. Respiratory illnesses and pneumonia caused by other organisms (including bacteria) and other viruses (such as influenza) can also cause these symptoms. 2019-nCoV is capable of causing severe illness, and some infected people have died. It is possible that people with underlying health conditions are at higher risk for severe disease.

### How does 2019-nCoV spread?

Authorities are continuing to investigate the source of the infection and how this new coronavirus spreads. Transmission is possibly happening via two routes:

- **Environment-to-human:** Preliminary information suggests that the novel coronavirus is zoonotic, or transmitted from an animal source to humans. The initial cluster of cases appeared to have a common source of exposure - a local live seafood and animal market.
- **Human-to-human:** from a sick person to others who are in close contact. In general, coronaviruses spread through infected respiratory droplets, just like other respiratory infections, including colds and influenza. A sick person expels these droplets when they cough, sneeze, or talk. Others can get the disease via contact (direct or indirect) with these contaminated droplets.

### Who is at risk for infection?



The disease can move from person to person, but it is not yet known how easily or sustainably it spreads. Scientists are studying the data as it becomes available. The initial cases reported having visited a seafood/animal market, which may have been a source of exposure. However now the main way the disease is spreading is from person to person.

Some people have had a mild illness and recovered. Others have had more severe infections. Critical and fatal cases have occurred. Preliminary evidence indicates that people with underlying medical conditions, elderly people and those with compromised immune systems may be at higher risk for severe illness.

### **Is there a vaccine?**

No. It may take months or years for a vaccine to be developed.

### **Can 2019-nCoV be treated?**

Not specifically. Patients receive supportive care, aimed at relieving their symptoms and preventing complications while they recover. This can include the use of mechanical ventilation if required. There is no specific antiviral therapy against this disease. Antibiotics are only effective against diseases caused by bacteria, not viral diseases like 2019-nCoV.

Studies are underway in China to see if an antiviral medication, "remdesivir", may be effective.

### **If I am sick in China, can I choose which clinic to go to?**

Certain medical facilities in China have been designated by the Department of Health as "fever clinics". These fever clinics manage any patients who suffer from fever and respiratory symptoms. Other facilities are mandated to refer any patients with fever and respiratory symptoms to these dedicated fever clinics.

If you are sick but do not have a fever or respiratory symptoms, then you can be treated in the non-fever clinic facilities.

International SOS advises its members in China who are suffering from symptoms of illness to call the Assistance Centre for advice before seeking care at a medical facility.

### **Is Tamiflu useful?**

The antiviral medication Tamiflu (oseltamivir) is not effective against 2019-nCoV. Tamiflu is used to treat influenza.

### **What about alternative treatments?**

Some authorities have recommended alternative treatments for 2019-nCoV. However, there is no evidence to confirm or disprove the effectiveness and safety of alternative treatments.

### **What can I do to protect myself?**

Avoid potential exposure. Practice good hygiene measures and safe food practices.



- Avoid direct contact with animals (live or dead) and their environment. Do not touch surfaces that may be contaminated with droppings.
- Keep some distance from people who are obviously sick.
- Maintain good personal hygiene. Wash your hands frequently. Carry hand sanitizer for use when soap and water are not readily available. Avoid touching your face.
- Ensure food, including eggs, is thoroughly cooked.
- Do not travel if you are sick. Note that some locations have implemented screening, and travelers may face quarantine and testing.

### Should I wear a face mask?

If your location has guidelines for the public, please follow them.

In some locations, authorities are requiring people to wear a mask when in public places. You must comply with any official directives.

In other locations, authorities are asking only people who are sick to use a face mask to cover their coughs and sneezes while they are seeking medical attention. Some authorities have advised to use masks while travelling or working in public places to reduce the chances of droplet transmission.

While surgical face masks may stop people touching their mouth, they do not stop breathing in the virus, nor the virus entering the eyes. They also will catch some of the droplets that are coughed and sneezed out.

Fitted respirators, such as 'P2' or 'N95' masks, require training and fitting. These are generally not being recommended for use by the public. They may be recommended to be used by those in close contact with infected people, such as healthcare workers or family members caring for sick relatives.

### A traveller has recently returned from Wuhan or an affected location. What should they do?

If there are local procedures in place from the local health authorities, these must be followed.

Anyone with a recent travel history to Wuhan or an affected location should monitor their health for at least 14 days. If symptoms develop, seek medical care. Inform your healthcare provider of your travel history before going to the facility in person.

### Can the virus be transmitted through packages shipped from China?

Based on experience with other coronaviruses (such as MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV), we do not believe that contaminated surfaces will be a major source of transmission of this virus. This would apply to items shipped from Wuhan and other areas where there are cases of this novel coronavirus. We do not believe that there will be any specific material handling requirements for shipments out of China. This coronavirus is primarily spreading to people who are in close unprotected direct contact with an infected person.



The [United States CDC advises](#) "Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of 2019-nCoV associated with imported goods".<sup>1</sup>

### Where is the outbreak predicted to spread?

Further imported cases into any location that has travellers from is occurring. Wherever there is an infected person, there is the potential for the virus to spread to people in close contact with them and local outbreaks can occur.

The World Health Organization assesses the risk as very high within China, and high regionally and globally.

The [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#) (ECDC) has assessed the risk within the EU / EEA and UK population in Europe as low, while the risk of people in areas with "presumed ongoing community transmission" as high.<sup>2</sup>

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in their [7 February update](#) advised "The potential public health threat posed by 2019-nCoV virus is high, both globally and to the United States", however " For the general American public, who are unlikely to be exposed to this virus, the immediate health risk from 2019-nCoV is considered low at this time."<sup>3</sup>

### Document Information

**Version:** 1.8

**Last modification:** February 9, 2020

---

<sup>1</sup> CDC (2020). 2019 Novel Coronavirus Frequently Asked Questions and Answers. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

<sup>2</sup> European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (9 Feb 2020). Current risk assessment on the novel coronavirus situation, 9 February 2020. <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/current-risk-assessment-novel-coronavirus-situation>

<sup>3</sup> CDC (2020). Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), Wuhan, China. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>