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## 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions

Current as of March 4, 2020

### What is 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

A new (novel) respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China.

### What is COVID-19?

On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 as the official name of the disease responsible for causing the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak. The breakdown of this new name COVID-19 is “CO” for corona, “VI” for virus, “D” for disease, and “-19” for 2019. This name now officiates the naming convention for this new virus. We will be updating our website and materials to reflect this updated name.

### How serious is this threat to the public?

Any outbreak of a novel virus is always a public health concern. The risk to individuals however, depends on the characteristics of the virus, including how easily it spreads between people, the severity of illness that it causes, and the medical measures available to control the virus and its impact (such as vaccines or medications). This virus is spreading quickly and has caused illness that has resulted in death in a small percentage of those who develop symptoms.

As community spreading occurs in more and more countries, the world moves closer toward meeting the third criteria of worldwide spread of the new virus. The potential public health threat posed by COVID-19 continues to grow both globally and in the United States.

Remember however, that individual risk is dependent on exposure.

- The general American public is not likely to be exposed to this virus at this time and the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is still considered low.
- Certain populations may have an increased risk of infection, including healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19 and other close contacts of persons with COVID-19.
- Visit the [CDC website for the current risk assessment in the United States](#)

### What is the source of the COVID-19 virus?

The exact source is not yet known; public health officials across the world are working to identify the source of the COVID-19 virus. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some causing illness in people and others that circulate among animals, including camels, cats, and bats. Early on, many of the patients in the outbreak in Wuhan reportedly had some link to a large seafood and animal market, suggesting the virus likely emerged from an animal source.

### How does the COVID-19 virus spread?

When the virus was first detected in Wuhan City, China, the people infected reported some link to a live animal market, suggesting animal-to-person spread, the virus is now spreading from person-to-person. Person-to-person spread is believed to be the main way the COVID-19 virus is spreading, meaning through close contact (within 6 feet/2 meters) with someone who is infected with the virus. It's important to note that person-to-person spread can happen on a continuum. Some viruses are



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highly contagious (like measles), while other viruses do not spread as easily. The COVID-19 virus seems to be spreading easily and sustainably in the areas or communities affected by the virus (community spread). Investigations are ongoing to learn more about the transmissibility, severity, and other features associated with the COVID-19 virus.

### What is community spread?

Community spread means that people are becoming infected with a virus or illness in an area or community, but the source of the infection is not known. During community spread, the virus is spreading from person-to-person without newly infected people knowing how or where they were exposed to the virus.

### What are the symptoms?

Patients infected with the COVID-19 virus have reported mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms that include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty Breathing

### How is COVID-19 diagnosed?

At the onset of the outbreak, the only way to confirm the COVID-19 virus was to send specimens to the CDC to perform laboratory testing. The CDC has since developed a laboratory testing kit for qualified state and local public health laboratories, Department of Defense laboratories, and international laboratories to detect the COVID-19 virus. The ability of more laboratories to perform testing greatly increases our capacity to detect the COVID-19 virus in the United States and reduce the time it takes to get test results.

The [County of San Diego Public Health Lab](#) has received the COVID-19 laboratory test kit and as of February 26, 2020 is able to perform local testing for the COVID-19 virus. Local healthcare providers should continue to coordinate with the local public health department to arrange testing for persons who meet the CDC criteria for testing.

### How is COVID-19 treated?

There is no specific antiviral treatment recommended for COVID-19 infection. People infected with the COVID-19 virus should receive supportive care to help relieve symptoms. For severe cases, treatment should include care to support vital organ functions.

### What can I do to prevent getting COVID-19?

There is currently no vaccine available to protect against COVID-19, but it is recommended for everyone to get their flu vaccine and practice proven and routine preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:



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- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

### What do travelers need to know about COVID-19?

In an effort to control the outbreak and slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus into the United States, new travel-related measures are being implemented.

- Several countries and territories throughout the world, including the United States, are implementing health screenings of travelers. Passengers undergo a health screening upon arrival in the United States and depending on their health and travel history may have some restrictions placed on their movement, such as, a federally mandated quarantine or home isolation and self-monitoring.
- A [Presidential Proclamation](#) has been issued outlining suspension of entry into the United States for Foreign Nationals who have visited China in the last 14 days.
- The CDC lists destinations where nonessential travel should be avoided and also lets people do a COVID-19 Risk Assessment search by country. Anyone considering international travel should visit the [CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel](#) page.

Countries currently experiencing sustained community transmission of the novel coronavirus where travel health notices have been issued\* include:

- [China](#)
- [Iran](#)
- [South Korea](#)
- [Italy](#)
- [Japan](#)

*\*Since this is a rapidly evolving situation, visit the [CDC Travel Information](#) page for the current list of areas with widespread or ongoing community spread of COVID-19 where travel health notices have been issued.*



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### What is the difference between quarantine and isolation?

Isolation and quarantine are used to protect the public by preventing exposure to infected people or to people who may be infected.

**Quarantine** is used to separate and restrict the movement of people who are well but who may have been exposed to an infectious disease to see if they become ill. These people may have been exposed to a disease and do not know it, or they may have the disease but are not showing symptoms. A quarantine can help limit the spread of infectious diseases.

**Isolation** is used to separate sick people (who have or may have an infectious disease) from people who are healthy. Isolation restricts the movement of ill people to help stop the spread of certain diseases. Isolation typically occurs in a hospital setting but can be done at home (self/home-monitoring) or in a special facility. Usually individuals are isolated, but larger groups can be isolated as well.

### What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

If you have traveled to an area affected by COVID-19\* within the last 14 days **or** had close contact (within 6 feet/2 meters) with someone who has been laboratory confirmed to have COVID-19 **and** developed a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, you should:

- Call a healthcare provider and seek medical advice—It is important that you call ahead before going to a doctor's office or emergency room and tell them about your recent travel or close contact and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others—Do not go to work, school, or travel while sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

Your healthcare provider will work with the health department to determine if you need to be tested for the COVID-19 virus.

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### What should I do if I think I have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus?

If you have had close contact (within 6 feet/2 meters) with someone who is confirmed to have, or being evaluated for, COVID-19 infection, you should:

- Monitor your health starting from the day you first had close contact with the person and continue for 14 days after you last had close contact with the person. Watch for these signs and symptoms:
  - Fever of 100.4°F/38°C or higher—Take your temperature twice a day.
  - Coughing.
  - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
  - Other early symptoms to watch for are chills, body aches, sore throat, headache, diarrhea, nausea/vomiting, and runny nose.
- If you develop fever or any of these symptoms, call your healthcare provider right away.
- Before going to your medical appointment, be sure to tell your healthcare provider about your close contact with someone who is confirmed to have or is being evaluated for COVID-19. This will help the healthcare provider's office take steps to keep other people from getting infected. Ask your healthcare provider to call the local or state health department.
- **If you do not have any symptoms**, you can continue with your daily activities, such as going to work, school, or visiting other public areas.

### Should I wear a face mask?

The CDC does not recommend the use of face masks for the **general public** to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Face masks are useful at preventing diseases from spreading when they are worn by people who have symptoms. Masks can help reduce the spread of illness when a sick person coughs or sneezes, this is why people are sometimes asked to wear a mask at a doctor's office or hospital if they are coughing or sneezing. Although there will likely be more cases of COVID-19 reported in the U.S. in the coming days and weeks, there is extremely limited person-to-person spreading of the COVID-19 virus in the U.S. The health risk to the general public from this virus remains low.

Risk, however, is dependent on exposure, **healthcare providers** working with patients with confirmed COVID-19 or patients under investigation for COVID-19 in healthcare settings should take the [precautions outlined by the CDC](#), with specific recommendations for personal protective equipment (PPE) including proper use of N-95 respirators.

Most **law enforcement, border protection officers and other workers** are unlikely to need PPE beyond what they would use to protect themselves during routine job tasks. If officers are entering rooms where travelers with suspected COVID-19 have been isolated, such as during augmented (i.e.



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secondary and tertiary) screening steps, higher-level PPE, including a gown and N-95 respirator may be required.

### What happened to the individuals from the repatriation flights into Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar?

The County of San Diego worked closely with our federal and state partners to coordinate care for the U.S. citizens that arrived on planes from the Hubei province of China at MCAS Miramar on 2/5/20 and 2/7/20. The federal government led this federally mandated quarantine effort and the County of San Diego supported their efforts to monitor and care for these repatriated citizens.

As of 2/24/20, all local quarantine efforts have discontinued. One of the two cases identified with COVID-19 was transferred to a military base in San Antonio, Texas to continue care and all persons have been cleared and released to travel to their final destinations and resume regular day-to-day life.

### What is the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) doing to help prepare for any COVID-19 cases that might occur in San Diego County residents?

HHSA is working with the CDC, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the local medical community and is utilizing standard procedures already in place to isolate, test, and investigate Patients Under Investigation (PUI). For information on the current situation in San Diego county, visit [www.coronavirus-sd.com](http://www.coronavirus-sd.com)

### What can I do to help prepare myself and my family in case COVID-19 starts spreading in our community?

- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would like to be cared for if they got sick, or what would be needed to care for them in your home.
- Develop childcare plans in case local schools close, and work with your employer to explore options that enable you to telework and decrease face-to-face meetings.
- Store a two-week supply of food, beverages, water, and medications for all those living in your home, including your pets.
- Periodically check your regular prescription drugs to ensure a continuous supply in your home.
- Have any nonprescription drugs and other health supplies on hand, including pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fluids with electrolytes, and vitamins.
- Get copies and maintain electronic versions of health records from doctors, hospitals, pharmacies and other sources and store them, for personal reference.

### Where can I find more information about COVID-19?



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Please see the following resources for more information about the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak:

- [County of San Diego Epidemiology Unit 2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) web page:](http://www.coronavirus-sd.com)  
**www.coronavirus-sd.com**
- [California Department of Public Health Novel Coronavirus 2019 \(n-CoV 2019\) web page](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) web page](#)
- [World Health Organization Novel Coronavirus web page](#)
- **For general information about the 2019 Novel Coronavirus in San Diego County, call 2-1-1.**