

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Definition

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infection of the airways and lungs. It causes a minor cold-like illness in most. Others may develop severe breathing problems or illness.

Causes

COVID-19 is caused by a new type of coronavirus that was first seen in humans in 2019. This new form has led to an outbreak of COVID-19 in some countries.

The virus is passed from person to person. Someone who is ill can release droplets with the virus when they sneeze or cough. The droplets can enter the mouth, nose, or eyes of those near the infected person. This seems to be the most common method of passing the illness. The droplets can also land on surfaces around someone who is ill. The virus may then pass when someone else touches the surface, and then touches their mouth, nose, or eyes.

Risk Factors

Risk of COVID-19 may be higher in people who:

- Have close contact with someone who has COVID-19. Close contact often means sharing a home or caring for someone with the disease.
- Live in or visit areas with active outbreaks.
- Have close contact with someone who has traveled to high-risk areas.

Active outbreaks of COVID-19 have been reported in many countries. Follow trusted sources like government sites and Center for Disease Control (CDC) to see the risk in your area.

The risk of severe infections may be more common in:

- Older adults
- People with health issues such as high blood pressure, heart disease, or diabetes

Symptoms

Some people will have very mild symptoms. Others will have:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Call your doctor if you think you have been exposed to coronavirus and now have fever, cough, or problems breathing. Call before you go to the doctor's office. This will help them send you to the right place and lower the risk of infecting other patients.

Some may develop more severe symptoms. **Get medical care immediately for:**

- Trouble breathing
- Nonstop chest pain or pressure
- Changes in awareness, confusion, or problems waking
- Bluish color in lips or face

Diagnosis

The doctor will ask about symptoms. There are many viruses and health issues that cause similar symptoms. The doctor may ask about risk factors to narrow possible causes. They may suspect COVID-19 if you have traveled to high risk areas, have had close contact with someone who has or may have COVID-19, or if there is an outbreak where you live.

Testing may not be needed if symptoms are mild. The doctor will explain why tests may or may not be done. If tests are done, a sample of fluid from the nose or throat, or a blood sample will be sent to a lab. This can confirm COVID-19.

Treatment

There is no treatment for COVID-19 itself. The body will need time to clear it out.

Mild symptoms can be handled at home. Basic care, such as rest and fluids, will help. Hospital care may be needed for severe symptoms. Oxygen therapy and medicine may be needed to help breathing. The hospital care team will also be able to respond to or treat any related problems.

Other steps can help to stop the spread of infection to others:

- Stay at home while you are ill. Avoid public areas, work, school, or public buses, trains, or cars. Only leave home if you need medical care until you have fully recovered.
- Try to avoid close contact with others at home. Stay about 6 feet away from others. If possible, spend most of your time in a separate room.
- Have someone wipe down common surfaces in the home. This includes doorknobs, counters, or sinks. Use household cleaners and wipe down these surfaces each day.
- Wash your hands often. Ask everyone else in your house wash their hands often, too. Wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use alcohol-based hand cleaner if soap and water is not on hand.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue. Throw away the tissue after use. Cough or sneeze into your elbow if you do not have a tissue.
- Use a face mask if you will be close to others such as sharing a room or vehicle. You should also wear a mask if you are going to a doctor's office or other public places.
- Avoid close contact with pets while you are sick. There is no proof of the virus passing to pets. This is a safety step until more is known about this virus.

Follow these steps until your doctor has said it is OK to stop.

Prevention

To help lower your chance of COVID-19:

- Avoid travel to high risk areas. Check with government travel restrictions and precautions.
- Wash your hands often. Wash with soap and water for 20 seconds each time. Use alcohol-based hand cleaner if soap and water is not available.

- Keep a safe distance (about 6 feet) from people who are sick.
- Try to stop touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Wear a facemask if you are caring for someone with COVID-19. You only need the facemask when you are in close contact.

People who are well do not need to wear a facemask when in public.

Stay aware of community news. Follow any recommended steps. This may include periods of time when you are asked to stay at home and avoid large groups. This can help to protect you and your family. It can also help to slow the spread of illness in the community.

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