What is a Coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

What are the Symptoms of COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell. Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. About 2% of people diagnosed with the disease have died. People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

How does COVID-19 spread?

People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease primarily spreads from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs or sneezes. These droplets can also land on objects and surfaces around the person and potentially spread infection when other people touch these objects or surfaces, then touch their eyes, nose or mouth. This is why it is important to stay more than 2 meters (6 feet) away from a person who is sick.

What Can I do to protect myself & prevent the spread of disease?

Protection measures for everyone: Stay aware of the latest information on the COVID-19 outbreak, available on the CDC and WHO websites and through your local public health authority. Most people who become infected experience mild illness and recover, but it can be more severe for others. Take care of your health and protect others by doing the following:

- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand rub.
  Why? Washing your hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.
- Maintain at least 2 meters (6 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
  Why? When someone coughs or sneezes they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
  Why? Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.
- Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.
  Why? Droplets spread viruses. By following good respiratory hygiene you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.
- Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough or difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority.
  Why? National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.
- Stay informed on the latest developments about COVID-19. Follow advice given by your healthcare provider, your national and local public health authority, and your employer on how to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.
  Why? National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on where COVID-19 is spreading in your area. They are best equipped to provide advice on what people in your area should be doing to protect themselves.

Some key points

- Practice hand hygiene! Hand-washing is the most preventable way to decrease the spread of disease and keep yourself safe.
- The incubation period can range from 1-14 days. This means it could take up to 14 days since you are initially exposed until you begin to experience symptoms.
- Routine surgical masks will not protect you from exposure to the virus. They will only aid in preventing the spread of it if you are already exposed. They should be reserved for individuals with respiratory symptoms.
- Antibiotics will not prevent or treat COVID-19. It is a virus and antibiotics do not work against viruses, only bacteria; therefore antibiotics should not be used as method of treatment or prevention against COVID-19.
- You can find additional myth busters and valid information regarding COVID-19 at the following resources:

 https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters

  https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses

  https://www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus

  https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

  https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/qa-on-covid-19-from-mayo-clinic/

Symptoms of coronavirus

The virus usually begins as a fever, which is followed by a dry cough. After approximately one week the cough leads to shortness of breath with some people requiring hospital treatment.

- Headache
- Sneezing
- Cough
- Shortness of breath, breathing difficulties
- Kidney failure
- Fever
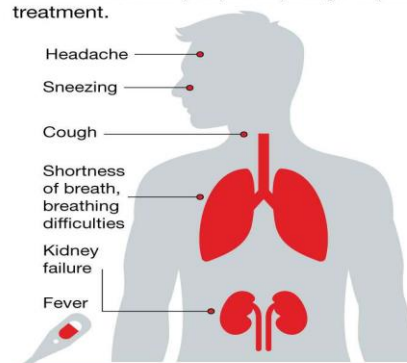
Reduce your risk

- Clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub
- Cover nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue
- Avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms
- Thoroughly cook meat and eggs
- Avoid unprotected contact with live wild or farm animals

*Information compiled by Dr. Jennifer Butler, Epidemiologist