

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

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- [Pregnant Women and COVID-19](#)
- [Healthcare Infection Prevention and Control](#)
- [Stigma Related to COVID-19](#)
- [Laboratory Biosafety](#)

Disease Basics


Q: What is a novel coronavirus?

A: A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is not that same as the [coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans](#) and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

A diagnosis with coronavirus 229E, NL63, OC43, or HKU1 is not the same as a COVID-19 diagnosis. Patients with COVID-19 will be evaluated and cared for differently than patients with common coronavirus diagnosis.

Q: Why is the disease causing the outbreak now being called coronavirus disease 2019, COVID-19?

A: On February 11, 2020 the World Health Organization [announced](#) an official name for the disease that is causing the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak, first identified in Wuhan China. The new name of this disease is coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19. In COVID-19, 'CO' stands for 'corona,' 'VI' for 'virus,' and 'D' for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as "2019 novel coronavirus" or "2019-nCoV."

There are [many types](#) of human coronaviruses including some that commonly cause mild upper-respiratory tract illnesses. COVID-19 is a new disease, caused by a novel (or new) coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans. The name of this disease was selected following the World Health Organization (WHO) [best practice](#)  for naming of new human infectious diseases.

Q: What is the name of the virus causing the outbreak of coronavirus disease starting in 2019?

A: On February 11, 2020, the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses, charged with naming new viruses, named the novel coronavirus, first identified in Wuhan, China, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, shortened to SARS-CoV-2.

As the name indicates, the virus is related to the SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV) that caused an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2002-2003, however it is not the same virus.

Q: What is the source of COVID-19?

A: Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause illness in people, and others, such as canine and feline coronaviruses, only infect animals. Rarely, animal coronaviruses that infect animals have emerged to infect people and can spread between people. This is suspected to have occurred for the virus that causes COVID-19. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) are two other examples of coronaviruses that originated from animals and then spread to people. More information about the source and spread of COVID-19 is available on the [Situation Summary: Source and Spread of the Virus](#).

Q: How does the virus causing Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19), spread?

A: This virus was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The first infections were linked to a live animal market, but the virus is now spreading from person-to-person. It's important to note that person-to-person spread can happen on a continuum. Some viruses are highly contagious (like measles), while other viruses are less so. Currently, it's unclear how easily or sustainably this virus is spreading between people. Learn what is known about the [spread of newly emerged coronaviruses](#).

Q: Can someone who has had COVID-19 spread the illness to others?

A: The virus that causes COVID-19 is [spreading from person-to-person](#). Someone who is actively sick with COVID-19 can spread the illness to others. That is why CDC recommends that these patients be isolated either in the hospital or at home (depending on how sick they are) until they are better and no longer pose a risk of infecting others.

How long someone is actively sick can vary so the decision on when to release someone from isolation is made on a case-by-case basis in consultation with doctors, infection prevention and control experts, and public health officials and involves considering specifics of each situation including disease severity, illness signs and symptoms, and results of laboratory testing for that patient.

Current [CDC guidance for when it is OK to release someone from isolation](#) is made on a case by case basis and includes meeting all of the following requirements:

- The patient is free from fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- The patient is no longer showing symptoms, including cough.
- The patient has tested negative on at least two consecutive respiratory specimens collected at least 24 hours apart.

Someone who has been released from isolation is not considered to pose a risk of infection to others.

Q: Can someone who has been quarantined for COVID-19 spread the illness to others?

A: Quarantine means separating a person or group of people who have been exposed to a contagious disease but have not developed illness (symptoms) from others who have not been exposed, in order to prevent the possible spread of that disease. Quarantine is usually established for the incubation period of the communicable disease, which is the span of time during which people have developed illness after exposure. For COVID-19, the period of quarantine is 14 days from the last date of exposure, because 14 days is the longest incubation period seen for similar coronaviruses. Someone who has been released from COVID-19 quarantine is not considered a risk for spreading the virus to others because they have not developed illness during the incubation period.

Q: Why might someone blame or avoid individuals and groups (create stigma) because of COVID-19?

A. People in the U.S. may be worried or anxious about friends and relatives who are living in or visiting areas where COVID-19 is spreading. Some people are worried about the disease. Fear and anxiety can lead to social stigma, for example, towards Chinese or other Asian Americans or people who were in quarantine.

Stigma is discrimination against an identifiable group of people, a place, or a nation. Stigma is associated with a lack of knowledge about how COVID-19 spreads, a need to blame someone, fears about disease and death, and gossip that spreads rumors and myths.

Stigma hurts everyone by creating more fear or anger towards ordinary people instead of the disease that is causing the problem.