



VANDERBILT
Student Health Center

2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions

COVID-19 FAQs: CLINICAL DISEASE & TRANSMISSION

What type of virus is COVID-19? Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats, and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people and then spread between people such as with MERS and SARS. Many of the patients in the pneumonia outbreak caused by COVID-19 in Wuhan, China had some link to a large seafood and live animal market, suggesting animal-to-person spread. However, a growing number of patients have not had exposure to animal markets, and it's clear now that person-to-person spread is occurring.

How is COVID-19 virus spread? It is not confirmed, but we think COVID-19 spreads like other coronaviruses (like those that cause SARS or MERS), by respiratory droplets. When person-to-person spread has occurred with MERS and SARS, it is thought to have happened via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. Spread of SARS and MERS between people has generally occurred between close contacts.

How contagious is COVID-19? It's important to note that how easily a virus spreads person-to-person can vary. Some viruses are highly contagious (like measles), while other viruses are less so. It's not clear yet how easily COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person. It's important to know this in order to better understand the risk associated with this virus. Preliminary information suggests this virus is not as contagious as the SARS virus.

What kind of symptoms do people infected with COVID-19 have? Patients with confirmed COVID-19 infection have reportedly had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of:

- fever
- cough
- shortness of breath

CDC believes at this time that symptoms of COVID-19 may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 after exposure.

Who is at risk for being infected with COVID-19? Currently, the CDC notes that persons at risk for COVID-19 as the following:

Have fever with symptoms of respiratory illness (e.g. cough or shortness of breath)

AND ONE OF THE FOLLOWING

History of travel within 14 days of symptom onset from a high risk country ([defined by the CDC](#))

OR

Close contact with a person who is under investigation for COVID-19

What if a person with fever and respiratory symptoms has contact with someone from a high-risk area, but has not been there personally? Could they have COVID-19?

Those persons would not be considered at risk unless their close contact was under investigation for COVID-19 or has confirmed infection.

What if a person has fever and respiratory symptoms and has been to places that have reported cases? Would they be at risk?

The risk is very low in countries that have small number of cases. The [CDC](#) defines high risk as those areas with widespread or sustained community transmission. This list of countries can change daily.

When can an infected person spread COVID-19 virus to others?

While not completely known, it likely mirrors that of other coronaviruses, in that spread occurs with fever and respiratory symptoms. It is not clear at present that asymptomatic spread occurs and is currently being studied.