2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Frequently Asked Questions

2019-nCoV FAQs: CLINICAL DISEASE & TRANSMISSION

What type of virus is 2019-nCoV? 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 2019-nCoV 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 reportedly have not had exposure to animal markets, indicating person-to-person spread is occurring.

How is 2019-nCoV virus spread? It is not confirmed but we think 2019-nCoV 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 2019-nCoV? 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 2019-nCoV 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 2019-nCoV have? Patients with confirmed 2019-nCoV 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 2019-nCoV may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 after exposure.

Who is at risk for being infected with 2019-nCoV? Currently, the CDC notes that persons at risk for 2019-nCoV as the following:
  • Have fever with symptoms of respiratory illness (e.g. cough or shortness of breath)
  • AND A) History of travel within 14 days of symptom onset from Wuhan City, China.
  • OR B) In the last 14 days before symptom onset, close contact with a person who is under investigation for 2019-nCoV while that person was ill. As the outbreak evolves, the area of concern may increase (i.e. expand to all of China). VUMC has included any travel to China as part of our initial screen to be safe as we work to identify potential cases.
What if a person with fever and respiratory symptoms has contact with someone from China but has not been there personally? Could they have 2019-nCoV?
Those persons would not be considered at risk unless their close contact was under investigation for 2019-nCoV or has confirmed infection.

What if a person has fever and respiratory symptoms and has been to places that have reported cases (like Singapore or Seattle)? Would they be at risk?
No, as there is no report of human-to-human transmission in those locations.

When can an infected person spread 2019-nCoV 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 thought at present that asymptomatic spread occurs.