

COVID-19 is a new respiratory disease, caused by a novel (or new) **coronavirus** that has not previously been seen in humans. Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Coronaviruses are a large group of viruses; some cause illness in people and some occur in animals, including camels, civet cats and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can evolve and infect people and then may spread between people. Human coronaviruses cause routine seasonal respiratory virus infections. Other coronaviruses, like SARS and MERS, can cause serious illnesses.

Source and spread

Chinese health officials have reported tens of thousands of cases of COVID-19 in China, with the virus reportedly spreading from person to person in parts of that country. COVID-19 illnesses, most of them associated with travel from Wuhan, also are being reported in a growing number of [international locations](#), including the [United States](#).

On March 4, the [CDC issued an updated Travel Health Alert](#) for all United States residents, instructing travelers returning from countries with a Level 3 alert (currently China, South Korea, Iran, and Italy) to self-quarantine (“stay home”) and monitor their health for 14 days after returning to the US. This guidance also instructs travelers from countries with a Level 2 alert (currently Japan) to monitor their health and limit interactions with others for 14 days after returning to the US. The guidance advises against any non-essential travel to Level 3 countries. For more information, see DPH's [travel information related to COVID-19](#).

How do coronaviruses spread?

Coronaviruses are respiratory viruses and are generally spread through respiratory secretions (droplets from coughs and sneezes) of an infected person to another person.

Symptoms

Symptoms of this infection may appear 2-14 days after exposure and include:

- Fever
- Cough and shortness of breath, and
- In severe cases, pneumonia (fluid in the lungs).

Call your healthcare professional if you develop symptoms, and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or if you have recently traveled from an area with widespread or ongoing community spread of COVID-19. See DPH's [travel information related to COVID-19](#).

Prevention

Many of the things you do to help prevent colds and the flu can help protect you against other respiratory viruses, including COVID-19:

- **Wash your hands often** with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
- **Avoid touching** your eyes, nose and mouth.
- **Clean things that are frequently touched** (like doorknobs and countertops) with household cleaning spray or wipes.
- **Cover your mouth** when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue or your inner elbow, not your hands.
- **Stay home if you are sick** and avoid close contact with others.

<https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/infectious-disease/2019-novel-coronavirus>

<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/2019-ncov.htm>

<https://health.ri.gov/diseases/ncov2019/>

<https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>