

CORONAVIRUS

What is it?

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China. Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease. The death rate appears to be between 1 and 2% but this will depend very much on your age and general health. For example in the first 44,000 known cases in China there were no deaths under 10 years old but a 15% death rate in those over 80.

Why is this worse than seasonal influenza?

It's worse because it is a new virus so no one has any kind of immunity. We have a seasonal flu vaccination programme which helps to reduce the numbers of people infected with seasonal influenza each year. Seasonal influenza is around every year and so there is a certain amount of resistance in the community so less people catch it. It also looks like this virus has a higher death rate from pneumonia compared with seasonal influenza, particularly in the elderly and those with chronic disease. In China we have already seen how this can have a devastating effect on a city trying to cope with the effect of this virus.

How is it spread?

From what we know about other coronaviruses, spread of COVID-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within 2 metres or less) with an infected person. It is likely that the risk increases the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

Respiratory secretions produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes containing the virus are most likely to be the main means of transmission.

There are 2 main routes by which people can spread COVID-19:

- infection can be spread to people who are nearby (within 2 metres) or possibly could be inhaled into the lungs.
- it is also possible that someone may become infected by touching a surface, object or the hand of an infected person that has been contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes (such as touching door knob or shaking hands then touching own face)

Our current understanding is that the virus doesn't live on surfaces for longer than 72 hours.

There is currently little evidence that people who are without symptoms are infectious to others.

How do we avoid catching it and spreading it to others?

Public Health England (PHE) recommends that the following general cold and flu precautions are taken to help prevent people from catching and spreading COVID-19:

- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze. See [Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)
- put used tissues in the bin straight away
- wash your hands with soap and water often – use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available. See [hand washing guidance](#)
- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

Face masks for the general public are not recommended to protect from infection, as there is no evidence of benefit from their use outside healthcare environments. They are given to people suspected of having the virus to reduce spread to others.

Who is at risk of catching COVID-19?

Currently in the UK the only individuals at risk of having COVID-19 are those who have had direct contact with a person who was unwell with COVID-19 at the time of contact or those with a relevant recent travel history. This falls into 2 categories. Category 1 High risk, where all travellers returning from these areas should self isolate for 14 days.

Category 2, Moderate risk, were travellers with a cough, temperature or shortness of breath are advised to self isolate for 14 days.

Current Public Health England PHE advice for returning travellers (as of 1.3.20)

The following link identifies current at risks areas and what travellers should do if they are returning back to the UK from these areas. This should be updated by PHE on a daily basis:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public#returning-travellers>

Public Health England (PHE) Guidance to Employers

The following link gives up to date advise to employers including what to do if a member of staff has returned from an at risk area, to how to decontaminate an area that has been exposed to someone who is known to have had the virus:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-covid-19>

What should I do if I think I have symptoms of the virus and relevant history of travel or exposure to an active case?

The advice is to call 111 and not to go to a pharmacy, GP Surgery or Hospital.

Self Isolation

Self-isolation is about protecting others and stopping the spread of COVID-19. It is very important that anyone who has or might have been exposed to the virus limits the number of people they come into contact with for 14 days. This is the most effective way of preventing the coronavirus from spreading.

Stay at home. Do not go to work, school or public areas. Do not use public transport like buses, trains, tubes or taxis. Avoid visitors to your home. Ask friends, family members or delivery services to carry out errands for you – such as getting groceries, medications or other shopping. It is important that you separate yourself from other people in your home and if you share facilities like toilets and bathrooms, regular cleaning will be required. You should stay in a well-ventilated room with a window that can be opened, separate from other people in your home.

More info on self isolation here:

<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/02/20/what-is-self-isolation-and-why-is-it-important/>

Gatherings and Meetings

There is currently no need to cancel any public gatherings in the UK (NHS England advice as of 29.2.19). However if the virus spreads in the UK then this may well change.

Advice in the Media

I have reviewed the information provided by the BBC on COVID-19 and feel it is up to date and accurate and would not hesitate as a GP to recommend it to others. The article below is I think informative and non sensational.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51674696>

This document was put together by Dr Jason Procter (GMC 4514866) at the request of David Flowers Senior pastor at Leeds Vineyard. It uses information mainly gathered directly from Public Health England (PHE) on 1 March 2020.