

# Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19)

## Poison Control FAQs

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### DISEASE BASICS

#### Q: What is a coronavirus?

**A: Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illness in animals and humans.** Human coronaviruses commonly circulate in the United States and usually cause mild illnesses like the common cold. Some coronaviruses can cause more serious illness, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV) and Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). The new coronavirus causes the illness Coronavirus Disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19.

#### Q: What is the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

**A: On Dec. 31, 2019, Chinese authorities reported an outbreak of pneumonia in Wuhan, China.** The cause of this outbreak was identified to be a new coronavirus, creating an illness named Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Most cases have occurred in China, but the virus is spreading in the community in some other countries like South Korea. The first U.S. case was reported in a traveler returning from China on Jan. 21, 2020 in Washington state.

#### Q: How is COVID-19 spread?

**A: Person-to-person transmission of coronaviruses such as SARS and MERS occur through droplets of respiratory secretions that are spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes.** This is similar to how other respiratory viruses are spread, such as the flu or viruses that cause the common cold. COVID-19 appears to spread in a similar manner. The risk of coronaviruses spreading from touching objects such as door handles is low.

#### Q: What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

**A: Symptoms of COVID-19 are very similar to the flu, including fever, cough, and shortness of breath, and may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure.** Most people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms that do not require hospitalization, although there have been reports of severe illness with a small percentage resulting in death. Respiratory symptoms alone are not an indicator for COVID-19. Illnesses including colds, influenza, and other respiratory viruses are common at this time of year.

**Q: Can COVID-19 be spread before someone has symptoms?**

**A: This is currently being evaluated. There are ongoing investigations to learn more.**

**Q: Is COVID-19 the same as MERS-CoV or the SARS virus?**

**A: No. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses.**

Some cause illness in humans and others cause illness in animals, including camels and bats. The recently emerged COVID-19 is not the same as the coronavirus that causes Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) or the coronavirus that causes Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). However, genetic analyses suggest this virus emerged from a virus related to SARS. There are ongoing investigations to learn more.

## DISEASE RISKS

Please refer to the [CDC Travel Advisories](#) to determine which areas are currently experiencing sustained community transmission of COVID-19.

**Q: Am I at risk?**

**A: The immediate health risk from COVID-19 to the general American public who has not traveled to an area with sustained community transmission of COVID-19 nor had contact with a case is considered low at this time.**

No one group, ethnicity, or population in the U.S. is at a higher risk for acquiring COVID-19 infection than others. Respiratory symptoms alone are not an indicator for COVID-19. Illnesses including Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and influenza are increasingly common at this time of year. People should take precautions to protect themselves from other circulating respiratory viruses such as influenza and RSV. Precautions should include frequent hand washing, avoiding touching your face, covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze, and making sure you have gotten your annual flu shot.

**Q: What should I do if I recently traveled to an area with sustained community transmission of COVID-19, but do not feel sick?**

**A: If you have recently traveled to an affected but do not feel ill, you should monitor yourself**

**Q: What is the source of this new virus?**

**A: The source is not currently known.** Many initial cases had visited an animal and seafood market in Wuhan in the days prior to becoming ill. In the past, other coronaviruses such as SARS and MERS have resulted from the transmission of animal coronaviruses to humans.

**Q: How serious is COVID-19?**

**A: COVID-19 illness has ranged from mild to severe.** There have been reports of severe illness, with a small percentage resulting in death. However, most cases have had mild illness and have been sent home from the hospital or have not required hospitalization.

**for symptoms.** If you develop symptoms within 14 days of travel to an affected area, you should contact a healthcare provider by phone before going to their office.

**Q: What should I do if I traveled to an area with sustained community transmission of COVID-19 and feel sick?**

**A: Persons who are experiencing symptoms such as a fever, cough or shortness of breath** and have visited an affected area or had close contact with someone who is suspected to be infected with COVID-19 in the past 14 days should seek immediate medical attention.

- Before you go to the doctor's office, emergency room or urgent care, call ahead and tell them your symptoms and recent travel history.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Do not travel while sick.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

**Q: What should I do if I recently had contact with someone who traveled to an area with sustained community transmission of COVID-19?**

**A: If you have had contact with someone while they were symptomatic after returning from an affected area, you should monitor yourself for symptoms and contact your provider if you start feeling ill.** If you have had contact with someone who did not have symptoms after returning from an affected area, you do not need to change your routine activities.

**Q: What should I do if I have an upcoming trip to an area with sustained community transmission of COVID-19?**

**A: CDC and the state of NC recommend that for older adults (age 65 and older) and those with serious underlying health conditions** (such as heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes) and those with weakened immune systems avoid travel if possible. You may also visit the U.S. State Department website for the latest federal travel recommendations: <https://www.state.gov/>

**Q: What should I do when I arrive from somewhere with outbreak of COVID-19?**

**A: All travelers arriving from areas with sustained community transmission of COVID-19, including business travelers, people who visited friends and family, tourists, and humanitarian workers may be screened and receive instructions at the airport.**

Additionally, travelers should take the following steps:

- Contact your local health department, and follow their instructions
- Monitor your health and watch for symptoms for 14 days after leaving China.
- If you get a fever or develop a cough or difficulty breathing during this 14-day period, avoid contact with others.
- Call your healthcare provider and local health department to tell them about your symptoms and your recent travel. They will provide further instruction about steps to take before your medical visit to help to reduce the risk that you will spread your illness to other people.
- Don't travel while you are sick.

**Q: What if a child in my care (i.e. schools, childcare centers, etc.) has symptoms?**

**A: The immediate health risk from COVID-19 to the general American public, including children, who have not traveled to an area with sustained community transmission of COVID-19 nor had contact with a case is considered low at this time.** Respiratory symptoms alone are not an indicator for COVID-19. Illnesses including Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and influenza are increasingly common at this time of year. People should take precautions to protect themselves from other circulating respiratory viruses such as influenza and RSV. Precautions should include frequent hand washing, avoiding touching your face, covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze, and making sure you have gotten your annual flu shot. Schools and childcare facilities should follow their health policies.

**Q: What if a student or staff member at my school/college/university has symptoms?**

**A: The immediate health risk from COVID-19 to the general American public who have not traveled to an area with sustained community transmission of COVID-19 nor had contact with a case is considered low at this time.** Respiratory symptoms alone are not an indicator for COVID-19. Illnesses including Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and influenza are increasingly common at this time of year. People should take precautions to protect themselves from other circulating respiratory viruses such as influenza and RSV. Precautions should include frequent hand washing, avoiding touching your face, covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze, and making sure you have gotten your annual flu shot. Schools/colleges/universities should follow their health policies.

**Q: Am I at risk for COVID-19 from packages or products shipping from China?**

**A: Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with imported goods** and there have not been any cases of COVID-19 in the United States associated with imported goods.

**Q: What are my risks while traveling in an airport, airplane or on a cruise ship? (bus, train, etc.)**

**A: Risk for exposure to COVID-19 is based on exposure to areas with sustained community transmission of COVID-19 or contact with someone symptomatic for or diagnosed with COVID-19.** CDC has recently recommended that US residents avoid cruise ship travel due to risk of exposure to COVID-19 and that older adults and those with chronic medical conditions to avoid unnecessary travel. To view the latest CDC travel recommendations, please visit the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

**Q: Have there been any cases of COVID-19 in the United States?**

**A: Yes.** Cases of COVID-19 are growing internationally and in the United States. To view the latest statistics in the United States, please visit the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>

## DIAGNOSIS, TESTING & TREATMENT

**Q: How is COVID-19 diagnosed?**

**A: The CDC has developed a laboratory test for this virus.** Testing is now available through private laboratory companies such as LabCorp and Quest and can be accessed through your routine healthcare provider. Testing is also available through the NC State Laboratory of Public Health (NCSLPH) and will continue to be coordinated through the NC Division of Public Health's Communicable Disease Branch for individuals who meet criteria for a person under investigation.

**Q: How can I get tested for COVID-19?**

**A: Testing for COVID-19 can only be conducted in consultation with your healthcare provider OR the NC Division of Public Health.** If you develop symptoms within 14 days after travel from an affected area or contact with a person known to have COVID-19, you should call to discuss this with your healthcare provider and your local health department.

**Q: I've seen different numbers of cases reported in the United States. Which number is correct?**

**A: The CDC website tracking U.S. cases divides cases up into three categories:** "Travel-related," "Person-to-person spread," and "Under Investigation." The numbers reflect data that includes both confirmed and presumptive positive cases of COVID-19 reported to CDC or tested at CDC since January 21, 2020, with the exception of testing results for persons repatriated to the United States from Wuhan, China and Japan. State and local public health departments are now testing and publicly reporting their cases. In the event of a discrepancy between CDC cases and cases reported by state and local public health officials, data reported by states should be considered the most up to date.

**Q: What treatment is available for COVID-19?**

**A: Most people with illnesses due to common coronavirus infections recover on their own.** There are no specific treatments for COVID-19. For people who become severely ill, hospitals can provide care. There is more to be learned about COVID-19 as the situation continues to evolve, and treatment options may change over time.

**Q: What should healthcare providers do?**

**A: If you are a healthcare provider and suspect your patient may be infected with COVID-19, you should use standard, contact and airborne precautions and eye protection.** Place the patient in an airborne isolation room, if available. Please immediately notify infection control and your local health department or the state Communicable Disease Branch at 919-733-3419.



**Q: How is it decided whether a person with a confirmed case of COVID-19 can self-isolate at home or must be confined to a hospital or elsewhere?**

**A: Local health departments will work in partnership with physicians and the Division of Public Health to determine whether a person with COVID-19 requires hospitalization or home isolation.** The decision may be based on multiple factors including severity of illness, need for testing, and suitability of home isolation.

**Q: An individual (e.g., student, employee) recently returned from an area with sustained community transmission of COVID-19. Can I require that they get tested for COVID-19 before returning to normal activities at my facility?**

**A: Travelers returning from affected areas will be contacted by their local health department and provided information about self-monitoring for symptoms.** If their local health department decides they can return to normal activity, they should be allowed to do so without restrictions. COVID-19 testing is generally reserved for people who are experiencing symptoms of the disease.

## PREVENTION

**Q: Is there a vaccine for Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)?**

**A: No.** Currently there is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. The best way to protect yourself from respiratory diseases like COVID-19 is to take common-sense precautions. These include frequent hand washing, avoiding touching your face, covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze, and making sure you have gotten your annual flu shot.

**Q: Should I wear a facemask to protect myself from COVID-19?**

**A: The CDC does not recommend that people who are healthy wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory viruses.** Facemasks should be used by people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and other respiratory illness like flu to protect others from getting infected. Healthcare providers and others taking care of people with COVID-19 should wear appropriate personal protective equipment, including a facemask or respirator.

**Q: Should I keep my children home from school to protect them from COVID-19?**

**A: At this time, the risk to the general public in North Carolina is considered to be very low.** Children do not need to be homeschooled or kept out of school due to concerns about COVID-19. The Division of Public Health is closely monitoring the situation and will work with schools to ensure that classrooms remain safe.

**Q: An individual (e.g., student, employee) recently returned from an area with sustained community transmission of COVID-19. Should I require that they wait 14 days before returning to normal activities at my facility?**

**A: Travelers returning from affected areas will be contacted by their local health department and provided information about self-monitoring for symptoms.** If they are not experiencing any symptoms and their local health department decides they can return to normal activity, they should be allowed to do so without restrictions. Facilities should use their normal flu policies to manage people with symptoms of respiratory illness.

**Q: What can I do to help?**

**A: Take the recommended precautions to protect yourself and others from all respiratory viruses which can include COVID-19.** To protect yourself from the flu, make sure you have gotten your annual flu shot. Treat people who have COVID-19 or who may have been exposed to the virus with compassion and speak up if you hear others making statements that cause stigma against people in your community. Be conscious of the spread of misinformation about COVID-19 and look directly to reliable sources like the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), the Division of Public Health and the CDC for updates.

## PREPAREDNESS

### Q: What can I do to be prepared if COVID-19 starts spreading in the U.S.?

**A:** The CDC recommends households have a plan of action to prepare for a COVID-19 outbreak (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/get-your-household-ready-for-COVID-19.html>). People should think about having daily necessities and medications to last about two weeks, in case they need to isolate. Massive stock piling of supplies is not necessary. Individuals and families should have a plan in case they need to miss work due to illness or need to care for a sick family member ([cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html)).

### Q: Should I buy masks to be prepared if COVID-19 starts spreading in the U.S.?

**A:** The CDC does not recommend that people who are healthy wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory viruses. Facemasks should be used by people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and other respiratory illness like flu to protect others from getting infected. If you are diagnosed with COVID-19, your healthcare provider or local health department will make sure you have the supplies you need to protect those around you.

## PETS & ANIMALS

### Q: Should I be concerned about pets or other animals contracting COVID-19?

**A:** While this virus seems to have emerged from an animal source in Wuhan, it is now spreading via person-to-person contact. There is no reason to think that any animals or pets in the United States might be a source of infection with this new coronavirus. For more information, please refer to the CDC FAQ about COVID-19 and animals:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#2019-nCoV-and-animals>

## NC RESPONSE

### Q: What is North Carolina doing about COVID-19?

**A:** In conjunction with federal, state, and local partners, North Carolina is actively responding to COVID-19 to protect the public's health. North Carolina's public health officials work with federal, state, and local partners to maintain a coordinated response to support returning travelers and protect the public's health. These activities include the following:

- The governor declared a state of emergency to deal with COVID-19, this declaration allows for funding to be made available for the response
- Establishing a Governor's Task Force to support and provide additional resources for the public health response.
- Maintaining a reliable up-to-date website with information about COVID-19 disease, risk, and guidance.

- Staffing the COVID-19 phone line to answer urgent questions from the public.
- Collaborating with federal, state, and local partners to share information and respond rapidly.
- Providing resources to providers and healthcare facilities to streamline and standardize response activities.

For the latest information and guidance see the DHHS Coronavirus Disease 2019 webpage (<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus>).

### Q: What did the governor's emergency declaration and executive order do?

**A:** The executive order and emergency declaration allows extra funding to be used for the coronavirus response.

## GUIDANCE FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS

**Q: What is the latest guidance for certain groups like pregnant women and businesses?**

**A: You can find CDC's latest guidance for specific groups on the following websites:**

• **Pregnant Women and Children:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/pregnant-women.html>

• **Businesses:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html>

**Q: What should older adults do to protect themselves from COVID-19?**

**A: CDC and NC DHHS recommend that older adults and those with chronic medical conditions avoid any unnecessary travel and cruise ship travel.** These populations should also avoid crowded venues and public gatherings as much as possible. This includes but isn't limited to conventions, church services, malls, concerts and other large gatherings.

**Q: What about the guidance to stop visitation at nursing homes and elder care facilities?**

**A: NC released guidance that nursing homes and congregate living facilities suspend all visitation.**

This is due to older adults and those with chronic conditions being more likely to have severe illness when infected with COVID-19. Group living arrangements also increase likelihood of transmission to others.

**Q: Where can I find additional information about COVID-19?**

**A: North Carolina resources can be found at [ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus](https://ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus).**

**Additionally, questions can be addressed 24/7 using the Coronavirus Helpline at 1-866-462-3821.**

You can find the latest information about COVID-19 case counts and guidance at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

