

# What is COVID-19?



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COVID-19 is a respiratory disease caused by a new coronavirus that presents pneumonia-like symptoms. The virus was identified in Wuhan, China, marking the beginning of its spread across the globe. Coronaviruses (CoV), so named for their “crown-like” appearance, are a large family of RNA viruses that infect mammals (including humans) and birds and include the viruses responsible for diseases like Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

## How is COVID-19 spread?

Researchers have now confirmed that the virus can spread via human-to-human transmission. The virus causing COVID-19 probably came from an animal source. According to the CDC, the virus that causes COVID-19 seems to be spreading easily and sustainably in the community in some affected geographic areas. The virus can spread between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

## Can people in the U.S. get COVID-19?

People who have traveled to heavily affected areas, such as China and South Korea, are at the greatest risk for contracting COVID-19. Close contacts of people who are infected are also at greater risk than the general public, for example health care workers and family or friends of people with COVID-19. Cases of COVID-19 in the US have been confirmed in multiple states.

## How can I protect myself?

- Wash hands often with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- Exercise everyday preventative actions to avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.

- The CDC has designated certain areas as zones of serious outbreak. Avoid traveling to areas designated with a level 3 risk. Exercise caution in level 1 and 2 areas.

## What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

## How do I keep from spreading illness to others if I am sick?

- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Call ahead to a healthcare professional if you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or difficulty breathing, and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or if you live in or have recently traveled to an area with ongoing spread.

## Is there a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19?

No current vaccine or antiviral treatment for COVID-19 exists. Clinical trials are underway. Medical professionals can help relieve symptoms of people with COVID-19.

[asm.org/Press-Releases/2020/  
COVID-19-Resources](https://asm.org/Press-Releases/2020/COVID-19-Resources)