

CORONAVIRUS – Frequently Asked Questions

About the Virus

What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

How it spreads?

How does the virus spread?

People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs or exhales. These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. People can also catch COVID-19 if they breathe in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs out or exhales droplets. This is why it is important to stay more than 1 meter (3 feet) away from a person who is sick.

Can someone who has been quarantined for COVID-19 spread the illness to others?

Quarantine means separating a person or group of people who have been exposed to a contagious disease but have not developed illness (symptoms) from others who have not been exposed, in order to prevent the possible spread of that disease. Quarantine is usually established for the incubation period of the communicable disease, which is the span of time during which people have developed illness after exposure. For COVID-19, the period of quarantine is 14 days from the last date of exposure, because 14 days is the longest incubation period seen for similar coronaviruses. Someone who has been released from COVID-19 quarantine is not considered a risk for spreading the virus to others because they have not developed illness during the incubation period.

What is the best way to slow the spread of coronavirus?

Wash your hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds and whenever you:

- Get home or into work
- Blow your nose, sneeze or cough
- Eat or handle food

It's important to use soap and water or a hand sanitiser.

How long does the virus survive on surface?

It is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

If you think a surface may be infected, clean it with simple disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others. Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

Symptoms & Testing

What are the symptoms and complications that COVID-19 can cause?

Current symptoms reported for patients with COVID-19 have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

Should I be tested for COVID-19?

Call your healthcare professional if you feel sick with fever, 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 travelled from an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19. Your healthcare professional will work with your state's public health department and CDC to determine if you need to be tested for COVID-19.

Who is at risk of developing severe illness?

While we are still learning about how COVID-19 affects people, older persons and persons with pre-existing medical conditions (such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer or diabetes) appear to develop serious illness more often than others.

Is there a vaccine for coronavirus?

There is currently no vaccine for coronavirus (COVID-19). The virus is so new and different that it needs its own vaccine. Simple hygiene measures like washing your hands with soap and water often, and avoiding people who are unwell, can help stop viruses like coronavirus spreading.

How to protect yourself

What can I do to protect myself and prevent the spread of disease?

Stay aware of the latest information on the COVID-19 outbreak, available on the WHO website and through your national and local public health authority. Many countries around the world have seen cases of COVID-19 and several have seen outbreaks. Authorities in China and some other countries have succeeded in slowing or stopping their outbreaks. However, the situation is unpredictable so check regularly for the latest news. You can reduce your chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19 by taking some simple precautions:

- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.
- Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.
- Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority.
- Stay informed on the latest developments about COVID-19. Follow advice given by your healthcare provider, your national and local public health authority or your employer on how to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.
- Keep up to date on the latest COVID-19 hotspots (cities or local areas where COVID-19 is spreading widely). If possible, avoid traveling to places – especially if you are an older person or have diabetes, heart or lung disease.

Control Access to the Ship

What is good practice to keep a healthy environment?

- If someone trying to board the vessel exhibits symptoms – refuse access and report it.
- Maintain effective ship and gangway security when in affected areas and ensure unauthorised personnel do not board the vessel.
- Restrict access into the ship's accommodation – keeps doors locked.
- Have hand sanitisers ready for use upon entry onto the ship.

Stay safe in port

What to do to stay safe in port

- Carefully consider whether it is safe to grant the crew shore leave when calling at affected ports.
- Get the latest advice on crew safety ashore from the port agent.
- Avoid making any crew changes in the ports of high-risk countries.
- Arrange delivery ship's provisions to be received at unaffected ports.