



2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions

March 13, 2020

What is 2019 Novel Coronavirus?

The 2019 Novel Coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. The initial reports of the outbreak suggested a link to a large seafood and animal market in Wuhan City. However, there is now evidence of a broader person to person transmission. Cases have been reported from other parts of China and other countries including the United States.

The first case in the United States was announced on January 21, 2020. The first case of person-to-person transmission in the U.S. was reported on January 30, 2020, in a close contact to a confirmed case. Community spread is being detected in a growing number of countries, including the United States, and it is likely that person-to-person spread will continue to occur.

What is a novel coronavirus?

COVID-19 is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold. A novel coronavirus is a new strain in the coronavirus family that has not been previously identified. Patients with COVID-19 will be evaluated and cared for differently than patients with common coronavirus diagnosis.

What is the source of COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some causing illness in people and others that circulate among animals, including camels, cats and bats. At this time, COVID-19 is thought to have originated in bats. SARS, a coronavirus that emerged to infect people in 2003, came from cats, while MERS, a coronavirus that began to infect people in 2012, came from camels.

How does the virus spread?

Most often, the spread from person-to-person happens among close contacts (about 6 feet). Person-to-person transmission is thought to occur mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how flu and other respiratory germs spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

It's currently unclear if a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes.

Typically, with most respiratory viruses, people are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Current symptoms reported for patients with COVID-19 have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. It can mimic flu symptoms, including fatigue. COVID-19 differs from the flu because it is connected with travel to a country or hotspot with widespread community transmission, or close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 14 days.

Should I be tested for COVID-19?

If you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days of travel to an affected country or hotspot, you should call a healthcare professional (prior to visiting a facility) and inform them of your recent travel and symptoms

If you develop a fever or symptoms of respiratory illness and have had close contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patient, you should call a healthcare professional (prior to visiting a facility) and discuss your exposure to a COVID-19 patient.

Your healthcare provider will work directly with Mississippi Department of Health to determine whether you need to be tested for COVID-19 through the MSDH Public Health Laboratory.

Can someone who has had COVID-19 spread the illness to others?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person. Someone who is actively sick with COVID-19 can spread the illness to others. This is why the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommends that these patients be isolated either in the hospital or at home (depending on how sick they are) until they are better and no longer pose a risk of infecting others.

How can I protect myself?

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus. However, as a reminder, the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) recommends preventive actions to help decrease the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- Get a flu vaccination every year
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Stay home when you are sick
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.

What is Mississippi doing to prepare for the spread of this virus?

The Mississippi Department of Health (MSDH) is working diligently with healthcare providers throughout the state to monitor the situation. The CDC continues to notify MSDH of individuals who have traveled to areas of concern and travelers with possible exposure. Upon notification from the CDC, MSDH initiates active monitoring of these individuals as indicated.

Additionally, any monitored individual who begins to show symptoms will be evaluated at an appropriate healthcare facility.

MSDH is working with all healthcare providers in the state to keep them aware of this changing situation and the latest recommendations as they become available.

Am I at risk for novel coronavirus from a package or products shipping from China?

In general, because these germs don't live long on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient temperatures. 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.

What about animals or animal products imported from China?

The CDC does not have any evidence to suggest that animals or any animal products imported from China pose a risk for spreading COVID-19 in the United States. However, that is a rapidly evolving situation and information will be posted as it becomes available. Currently the strongest risk of transmission is respiratory droplets.

Where can I go for more information about COVID-19?

- Visit the MSDH website at <http://HealthyMS.com>
- Call the MSDH COVID-19 hotline (Monday- Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m.) at 1-877-978-6453.
- Download the free MS Ready app on your smartphone to receive public health information and alerts from MSDH.