

Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions Last Updated: March 1, 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide public health and community partners with frequently asked questions and answers that may be used to assist in responding to inquiries from their communities.

General Information

What is a novel Coronavirus?

A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is not the same as the [coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans](#) and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

A diagnosis with coronavirus 229E, NL63, OC43, or HKU1 is not the same as a COVID-19 diagnosis. 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 cause illness in people, and others, such as canine and feline coronaviruses, only infect animals. Rarely, animal coronaviruses that infect animals have emerged to infect people and can spread between people. This is suspected to have occurred for the virus that causes COVID-19. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 1 (SARS-CoV-1) are two other examples of coronaviruses that originated from animals and then spread to people.

Is COVID-19 the same as the MERS-CoV or SARS-CoV-1 virus?

No. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some coronaviruses cause cold-like illnesses in people. Others cause illness in certain types of animals, such as cattle, camels and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can spread to people. This happened with SARS-CoV-1 and MERS-CoV. The virus that causes COVID-19 likely also originated in an animal and spread to humans. The coronavirus most similar to the virus causing COVID-19 is SARS-CoV-1. There are ongoing investigations to learn more. The situation is changing, and information will be updated as it becomes available.

Will warm weather stop the outbreak of COVID-19?

It is not yet known if weather and temperature impact the spread of COVID-19. Some other viruses, like the common cold and flu, spread more during cold weather months but people can still become sick with these viruses during other months. At this time, it is not known whether the spread of COVID-19 will decrease when weather becomes warmer. There is much more to learn about the transmissibility, severity, and other features associated with COVID-19 and investigations are ongoing.

Illness

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms usually appear in about 3 or 4 days, but may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure to a person with COVID-19. Symptoms of people with confirmed COVID-19 infections have primarily included:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Read about [COVID-19 Symptoms](#).

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. That is why CDC 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 is COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person, most likely through respiratory droplets, including:

- Through the air by coughing and sneezing;
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands;
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

This is similar to how flu and other respiratory infections spread. Until we learn more about how easily COVID-19 spreads between people, healthcare providers may wear special personal protective equipment (e.g., masks and eye protection) when evaluating a patient if there is a possibility of infection with COVID-19.

Everywhere I go people are coughing. How do I know they don't have this new virus?

There are many illnesses circulating this winter. For the general American public, including those living in NH, immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low. Please take simple steps to prevent yourself and your loved ones from becoming ill.

Is there a treatment for COVID-19?

There are no specific treatments recommended for infection with the COVID-19. People infected with COVID-19 can receive supportive care at home to help relieve symptoms, such as taking pain or fever medications, drinking plenty of fluids, and staying home and resting. Some patients who are very sick may need to go to the hospital to get care.

Is there a vaccine for COVID-19?

Not yet. Scientists are working on developing a vaccine to prevent COVID-19. More information about COVID-19 vaccine development can be found on the [National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease website](#).

What if think I might have COVID-19?

If you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after travel from China or other counties with travel advisories for COVID-19, you should call ahead to a healthcare professional and mention your recent travel. If you have had close contact with someone showing these symptoms who has recently traveled from this area, you should call ahead to a

healthcare professional and mention your close contact and their recent travel. Your healthcare professional will work with our state public health department to determine if you need to be tested for COVID-19. You can also contact the NH Division of Public Health Services if you have questions or concerns at 603-271-4496.

How sick are people with COVID-19?

The complete clinical picture with regard to COVID-19 is still not fully known. Reported illnesses have ranged from infected people with little to no symptoms to people being severely ill and dying.

Prevention

How can I protect myself and others from COVID-19?

There are steps you can take to reduce your risk of getting sick from viral respiratory infections, and help prevent transmitting infections to others, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces.
- Stay home from work or school if you have a fever or are not feeling well.
- Get a flu shot - it is not too late to be protected from flu.

Should I buy masks or wear one in public?

Masks are not recommended for the general public as a way to prevent infection. You should only wear a mask if you yourself are experiencing symptoms of a respiratory illness and need to travel (e.g. to a health care provider office) and might be in areas with potential close contact to others, or if you are taking care of someone who may be infected. Buying masks is depleting supplies for health care professionals who need them to reduce the spread of disease and keep you safe.

What should business be doing?

Many business organizations within New Hampshire are concerned about how the current outbreak of COVID-19 in China and other countries will impact their communities and are seeking ways to stay healthy. The New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services (NH DPHS) is working with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support our communities by developing guidance and education materials, such as the [COVID-19 Information for Businesses](#), which can be found on the NH DPHS COVID-19 website.

Is there specific guidance for schools, colleges and universities?

Health officials are currently taking steps to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 into NH communities. Schools can play an important role in this effort. Through collaboration and coordination with local health departments, schools are taking steps to disseminate information about the disease and its potential transmission within their school community. The New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services (NH DPHS) is working with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support our communities by developing guidance and education materials, such as the [COVID-19 Information for Schools](#), which can be found on the NH DPHS COVID-19 webpage.

Risk-related concerns

I have not traveled to China, but I have been around people in my community who are from China.

Am I at risk?

People in the U.S. may be concerned about friends and relatives who are living in or visiting areas where COVID-19 is spreading. Some people are worried about catching the disease. Fear and anxiety can lead to social stigma, for example, towards Chinese or other Asian Americans or people who were in self-quarantine.

Stigma is discrimination against an identifiable group of people, a place, or a nation. Stigma is associated with a lack of knowledge about how COVID-19 spreads, a need to blame someone, fears about disease and death, and gossip that spreads rumors and myths. Stigma hurts everyone by creating more fear or anger towards ordinary people instead of the disease that is causing the problem.

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

There is still a lot that is unknown about the newly emerged COVID-19 and how it spreads. Two other coronaviruses have emerged previously to cause severe illness in people (MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV-1). The virus that causes COVID-19 is more genetically related to SARS-CoV-1 than MERS-CoV. While we don't know for sure that this virus will behave the same way as SARS-CoV-1 and MERS-CoV, we can use the information gained from both of these earlier coronaviruses to guide us. In general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses 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. Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread most often by respiratory droplets. 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 risks do animals or animal products imported from China pose?

CDC does not have any evidence to suggest that animals or animal products imported from China pose a risk for spreading COVID-19 in the United States. This is a rapidly evolving situation and information will be updated as it becomes available. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) play distinct but complementary roles in regulating the importation of live animals and animal products into the United States. [CDC regulates](#) animals and animal products that pose a threat to human health, USDA regulates animals and animal products that pose a threat to agriculture; and [FWS regulates](#) importation of endangered species and wildlife that can harm the health and welfare of humans, the interests of agriculture, horticulture, or forestry, and the welfare and survival of wildlife resources.

Should I be concerned about pets or other animals and COVID-19?

While this virus seems to have emerged from an animal source, it is now spreading from person-to-person. There is no reason to think that any animals including pets in the United States might be a source of infection with this new coronavirus. To date, CDC has not received any reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19. At this time, there is no evidence that companion animals including pets can spread COVID-19. However, since animals can spread other diseases to people, it's always a good idea to wash your hands after being around animals. For more information on the many benefits of pet ownership, as well as staying safe and healthy around animals including pets, livestock, and wildlife, visit CDC's [Healthy Pets, Healthy People website](#).

Are there special cleaning procedures that should be followed in response to COVID-19?

Special sanitizing processes beyond routine cleaning, including closing schools or offices to clean every surface in the building are not necessary or recommended to slow the spread of respiratory illness. Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, countertops) with the cleaners typically used. Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label.

Travel-related concerns

What if I recently traveled to an area affected by COVID-19 and am sick?

If you were in a country with COVID-19 and feel sick with fever or a respiratory illness (e.g. cough, or difficulty breathing), within 14 days after you left you should:

- Seek medical care right away. Before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others. Try to stay 6 feet from other people.
- Not travel while sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds to avoid spreading the virus to others. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

CDC does have additional specific [guidance for travelers](#) available online.

What about families of people who have been in China?

There is no public health reason to exclude family members of people with no symptoms who were in China or a country with active community spread of disease in the previous 14 days. Family members who did not travel may go to school or work if the person who traveled has no symptoms.

I am traveling to a country with a travel notice. Should I cancel?

Travel notices are based on assessment of the potential health risks involved with traveling to a certain area. A list of destinations with COVID-19 [travel notices](#) is available on the CDC website.

Warning Level 3: CDC recommends travelers avoid all nonessential travel to destinations with level 3 travel notices because of the risk of getting COVID-19.

Alert Level 2: Because COVID-19 can be more serious in older adults and those with chronic medical conditions, people in these groups should talk to a healthcare provider and consider postponing travel to destinations with level 2 travel notices.

Watch Level 1: CDC does not recommend canceling or postponing travel to destinations with level 1 travel notices because the risk of COVID-19 is thought to be low.

If you travel, take the following routine precautions:

- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean your hands often by washing them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty. It is especially important to clean hands after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose

If you travel to a location with any level of travel advisory for COVID-19, when you return, you should remain alert for fever or respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath). An informational [handout on self-observation](#) is available on the NH DPHS website and can be provided to travelers.

Is it safe to go on a cruise?

Travelers should reconsider cruise ship voyages to or within Asia. Those planning travel by cruise ship elsewhere should be aware that, because of the current public health situation, many countries have implemented strict screening procedures in order to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19. This is a dynamic situation and those traveling by ship may be impacted by travel restrictions affecting their itineraries or ability to disembark or may be subject to quarantine procedures implemented by the local authorities.

Cruises put large numbers of people, often from countries around the world, in frequent and close contact with each other. This can promote the spread of respiratory viruses, such as the virus that causes COVID-19. You may get sick from close contact with an infected person or by touching contaminated surfaces.

To reduce spread of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, CDC recommends that crew members and passengers:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- 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.
 - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol.
- Stay in your cabin when you are sick and let the onboard medical center know immediately if you develop a fever (100.4°F/38°C or higher), begin to feel feverish, or have other symptoms (such as cough, runny nose, shortness of breath, or sore throat).

What is the risk of getting COVID-19 on an airplane?

Because of how air circulates and is filtered on airplanes, most viruses and other germs do not spread easily on airplanes. Although the risk of infection on an airplane is low, travelers should try to avoid contact with sick passengers and wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that contain 60%–95% alcohol.

What precautions should be taken by people who travel internationally?

People should avoid all travel to any locations for which CDC has issued a Level 3 travel notice. Given the rapidly evolving outbreak and frequently changing travel advisories, people should also consider postponing any nonessential travel to countries with a Level 2 travel advisory for COVID-19. A list of destinations with COVID-19 [travel notices](#) is available on the CDC website.

People who are asymptomatic and have returned from mainland China are being monitored by public health authorities and must stay home for 14 days after their arrival.

People who are asymptomatic and have returned from other locations with travel notices for COVID-19 may continue to attend work and school. They are not being monitored by public health authorities so they must 'self observe': remain alert for fever or respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath). If symptoms develop the individual should:

- Take their temperature with a thermometer
- Stay home and avoid close contact with other people
- Seek health advice by phone from either a healthcare provider or the NH DPHS at 603-271-4496 (after hours 603-271-5300).
- Before going to a doctor's office or emergency room, the individual should call ahead and tell the provider or office about recent travel and symptoms.
- Practice strict respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene including covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Symptomatic individuals should wear a surgical mask when traveling outside of the home (e.g., to a doctor's office) to protect others.

Questions from Medical Providers

Please refer all medical providers with questions specific to a patient or situation to contact the NH Division of Public Health Services, Public Health Professional on call 24/7 at 603-271-4496 (business hours) or 603-271-5300 (after business hours).

NH DPHS Response

We care deeply about the health and wellbeing of the people of NH. We are committed to sharing accurate information with the public to ensure the optimal health and wellbeing of all NH residents while also ensuring we uphold the highest privacy standards for individual patients. As an organization we rely on the best available science and evidence-based practices. In rapidly evolving situations such as this we will provide updated information as it becomes available.

NH DPHS has been working closely with CDC since the first case of COVID-19 was detected in the United States. We are working with our healthcare and public health partners to ensure readiness to identify and respond to potential cases of COVID-19.

To date, NH DHHS key activities have included:

- Activation of our Incident Management Team to coordinate our public health response with emergency services, homeland security officials, and other public health partners
- Identifying and investigating people with suspect COVID-19 and their close contacts
- Implementing illness monitoring and quarantine for travelers returning from mainland China
- Preparing and shipping specimens to CDC for testing while simultaneously working with CDC to implement the testing locally here in the NH Public Health Laboratories
- Providing technical guidance and information to healthcare and public health partners through health alerts, written guidance and webinars
- Planning for future potential for community transmission in the United States including addressing needs for medical surge, community mitigation, and providing housing, transportation, and wrap-around services (e.g. food) for people under isolation or quarantine due to illness or exposure
- Maintaining situational awareness for COVID-19 across the globe and providing updates to stakeholders
- Maintaining daily communications with federal partners including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, and other national organizations
- Maintaining regular communications with other state agencies, local health departments, and other partners
- Informing the public on respiratory disease prevention measures through media interviews and social media posts

In outbreaks such as this, public health recommendations may change. We encourage you to check these key resources frequently for updates:

- U.S. CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>
- NH DPHS website: <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/2019-ncov.htm>

Key NH DHHS Contacts

1. For COVID-19 general or clinical questions: Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at 603-271-4496.
2. For questions about healthcare surge or personal protective equipment (PPE) supply issues: Leigh Cheney at The Emergency Services Unit: 603-573-6319.