

2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was identified in China during a respiratory illness outbreak in Wuhan which started in late 2019. It causes severe respiratory illness. Human to human transmission is most likely to be through direct contact with infectious patients.

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What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some cause illness in humans, and others cause illness in animals, such as bats, camels, and civets. Human coronaviruses cause mild illness, such as the common cold.

Rarely, animal coronaviruses can evolve to infect and spread among humans, causing severe diseases such as [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome \(SARS\)](#) which emerged in 2002, and [Middle East Respiratory Syndrome \(MERS\)](#) which emerged in 2012.

A novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans.

What is 2019 novel coronavirus?

There is a new coronavirus affecting people who have recently been in the city of Wuhan, China. There is much more to learn about how it is spread, its severity, and other features associated with 2019-nCoV, and investigations are ongoing. At the moment, this coronavirus is called 'novel coronavirus 2019' or '2019-nCoV'.

Outbreaks of a novel coronavirus infections among people are always a public health concern. There is growing evidence that 2019-nCoV can spread from person to person in the community and in health care settings. There have been cases of 2019-nCoV reported in several Asian and other countries including Australia. The situation is evolving rapidly.

What are the symptoms?

Most case-patients have had fever, cough, and shortness of breath, with further evidence of pneumonia (chest infection).

Further investigation is required to assess whether there are undetected asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic cases.

How is it spread?

Early reports indicated that most of the cases had prior contact with a seafood and live animal market, suggesting an animal source of the outbreak. However, more recently, human to human transmission has been reported. Further investigation is underway to confirm and describe the mode of transmission from animal sources, and the risk of human-to-human transmission.

Human to human transmission is most likely to be through direct contact with infectious patients, by respiratory droplets and by fomites (contaminated objects and surfaces), as is seen with other coronavirus infections including SARS and MERS.

Who is at risk?

People who are living or travelling to affected areas or who have had contact with other cases may be at risk of catching the disease. People with underlying illnesses that make them more vulnerable to respiratory disease, including those with diabetes, chronic lung disease, pre-existing kidney failure, people with suppressed immune systems and the elderly may be at a higher risk.

How is it prevented?

It's likely that general prevention measures used for other coronavirus infections will also prevent infection with 2019-nCoV.

The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) recommends measures to reduce the general risk of acute respiratory infections while travelling in or from affected areas by:

- avoiding close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections;
- frequent hand-washing, especially after direct contact with ill people or their environment;
- avoiding close contact with live or dead farm or wild animals;
- travellers with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, and wash hands).

Travellers to China are already advised not to visit live bird and animal markets, including 'wet' markets, due to the risk of [avian influenza](#).

There is currently no vaccine to prevent 2019-nCoV infections.

What should I do if I have returned from affected areas or have been in contact with a patient with coronavirus in the last 14 days?

If you become ill or feel unwell while travelling in China, you should not wait until you arrive back in Australia to seek medical assistance. Instead you should see a doctor or go to the local emergency department.

If you develop a fever, a cough, sore throat or shortness of breath within 14 days of travel or have had contact with a person with confirmed coronavirus, you should immediately isolate yourself from other people. Contact your GP or your emergency department or call the healthdirect helpline 1800 022 222 and seek medical attention as soon as possible.

It is important to phone ahead so that the practice or emergency department can make appropriate preparations and protect others.

When seeking medical care wear a surgical mask (if possible) otherwise ask for one when you arrive.

How is it diagnosed?

Infection with 2019-nCoV is diagnosed by finding evidence of the virus in respiratory samples such as swabs from the throat or fluid from the lungs. Testing for 2019-nCoV is done in public health laboratories.

How is it treated?

There is currently no specific treatment for people who are sick with 2019-nCoV but general supportive medical care in hospital can be life-saving.

What is the public health response?

As of 23 January 2020, in Australia, procedures to prevent the local spread of 2019-nCoV have been put in place.

Public health unit staff will investigate all cases to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people at risk of infection, implement control measures and provide other advice.

Further information

- World Health Organization novel coronavirus information – <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/novel-coronavirus>
- NSW Health novel coronavirus alerts for GPs and hospital clinicians – <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/default.aspx>

If you are unwell, please contact your GP, emergency department or the healthdirect helpline 1800 022 222.

For further information see the NSW Health website:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>