

# TIP SHEET: UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING THE CORONAVIRUS

## HOW DOES THE CORONAVIRUS SPREAD?

Much is unknown about how COVID-19 spreads. Current knowledge is largely based on what is known about similar coronaviruses. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people and then spread between people such as with MERS, SARS and now with COVID-19.

Most often, spread from person to person happens among close contacts (about six feet). Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens 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 possibly their eyes. Typically, with most respiratory viruses, people are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).

It's important to note that how easily a virus spreads person-to-person can vary. Some viruses are highly contagious (like measles), while other viruses are less so. There is much more to learn about the transmissibility, severity and other features associated with COVID-19, and investigations are ongoing.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS AND COMPLICATIONS OF THE CORONAVIRUS?

For confirmed COVID-19 infections, reported illnesses have ranged from people with mild symptoms to people being severely ill and dying. Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

It is important to note that the CDC believes at this time that symptoms of COVID-19 may appear in as few as two days or as long as 14 after exposure. This is based on what has been seen previously as the incubation period of MERS viruses.

## HOW CAN YOU PREVENT THE CORONAVIRUS?

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 infection. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus. These are everyday habits that can help prevent the spread of several viruses. However, as a reminder, CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- 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.

# TIP SHEET: UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING THE CORONAVIRUS

- Follow CDC's recommendations for using facemask:
  - CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear facemask to protect themselves from respiratory viruses, including COVID-19.
  - Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of 2019 novel coronavirus, in order to protect others from the risk of getting infected. The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).
- 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 with at least 60 percent alcohol.
  - Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

## WHAT ARE TREATMENTS FOR THE CORONAVIRUS?

There is no specific antiviral treatment recommended for COVID-19 infection. People infected with COVID-19 should receive supportive care to help relieve symptoms. For severe cases, treatment should include care to support vital organ functions.

People who think they may have been exposed to COVID-19 should contact their health care provider immediately.

*SOURCE: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases. (Revised 2020, February 5–10). 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) & What you need to know about COVID-19. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov>*