

### **What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?**

Coronavirus Disease 2019, commonly known as COVID-19 or COVID, is a respiratory infection caused by the coronavirus Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 were first identified in the Wuhan Province in China in December 2019. Since then, the virus has spread rapidly around the world, causing a pandemic and hundreds of millions of infections.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can infect and cause disease in humans and animals. There are currently seven known types of coronaviruses that infect humans. Four of these are common and cause mild respiratory infections like the common cold. The remaining three types, which include SARS-CoV-2, cause more severe respiratory infections.

### **Who gets COVID-19?**

The virus is highly contagious and anyone exposed can develop COVID-19 infection. Older adults and people who have certain underlying medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease or diabetes, are at higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness.

### **How does COVID-19 spread?**

COVID-19 spreads when an infected person breathes out droplets or small particles that contain the virus. This can happen while breathing, speaking, singing, or exercising. These droplets and particles can then be breathed in by another person, or they can land on their eyes, nose, or mouth. Sometimes, the infected person may contaminate surfaces they touch and others will become infected by touching their eyes, nose, or mouth with contaminated hands. People who are closer than six feet from an infected person are most likely to get infected.

### **What are the symptoms of COVID-19 infection?**

Illness from COVID-19 infection can range from no symptoms or very mild symptoms to severe illness that can result in hospitalization, intensive care, or death. The more common symptoms include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

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While anyone can have symptoms, older adults and people with certain underlying medical conditions (e.g., heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, and weakened immune systems) have a higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness. Symptoms of serious illness include:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds

### **How soon after exposure do symptoms occur?**

Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus.

### **How are COVID-19 infections diagnosed?**

Two types of viral tests are used to diagnose a current COVID-19 infection. A molecular test (also called RT-PCR) is used to detect the genetic material that makes up the virus. An antigen test is used to find specific proteins that are found on the surface of the virus. Both types of test can determine if you have an active COVID-19 infection. Molecular and antigen tests are usually performed by taking samples from the nose using long swabs. Your healthcare provider may determine whether to conduct tests for the virus based on your signs and symptoms, whether you have had close contact with an infected person, if you have a condition that puts you at higher risk for severe illness, or if you are going to have a medical procedure. Tests can be performed in a laboratory, at a testing site, or in your own home.

### **What is the treatment for COVID-19?**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved one drug (Remdesivir) for the treatment of patients with COVID-19. The FDA has also issued an emergency use authorization for other drugs for certain adults and children. These drugs include monoclonal antibodies and antivirals. People who have a positive COVID-19 test and are at higher risk for severe illness should contact their healthcare provider right away to see if they are eligible for treatment. Treatment must be started within the first few days of illness to be effective.

### **How can COVID-19 infection be prevented?**

There are several strategies that should be followed to slow the spread of COVID-19.

- Get vaccinated and stay [up to date](#) on your vaccines to have the best protection. This applies to everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated and boosted, including people with weakened immune systems.
  - People who have a condition or are taking medications that weaken their immune system may **not** be fully protected even if they are up to date on their vaccines. They should talk to their healthcare provider about steps to take to protect themselves.
- Drugs might be available for people at higher risk for severe illness before or after they have been exposed to COVID-19.

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- You should always wear a mask if you have COVID-19 (or symptoms) and need to be around others or if you are caring for someone who has COVID-19. You may choose to wear a mask after an [exposure](#) to someone with COVID-19, and are around other people, particularly those who are more likely to get [very sick from COVID-19](#). You may also choose to mask indoors in public if the [COVID-19 Community Level](#) is high, regardless of your vaccination status. People at higher risk for severe illness and people who live or spend time with someone at higher risk should talk with their healthcare provider about wearing a mask if the [COVID-19 Community Level](#) is medium.
  - Some people should never wear a mask. These include children under the age of 2 years; any child when the child is sleeping; people who have trouble breathing, are incapacitated, or who are otherwise unable to remove the mask without help; people with a disability who cannot wear a mask, or cannot safely wear a mask, for reasons related to the disability.
- Avoid indoor areas that have poor airflow (ventilation) and crowds. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk for severe illness.
- Get tested if you have COVID-19 symptoms or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Stay home if you are sick or have a positive COVID-19 test.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Clean surfaces that are touched often using household cleaners, such as soap or detergent.

### How can I learn more about COVID-19?

- If you have concerns about COVID-19, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/local-health-districts/>.
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

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