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What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

Coronavirus Disease 2019, commonly known as COVID-19 or COVID, is a respiratory infection caused by a coronavirus called 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 increased 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

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 genetic material from the virus. An antigen test is used to find specific proteins that are found on the surface of the virus. Antigen tests are available over-the-counter for at home use. Both types of tests 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 treatments are available for COVID-19?

Currently, three medications are either authorized or approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of COVID-19: Paxlovid, Veklury, and Lagevrio. People who have been diagnosed with mild to moderate COVID-19 and are at higher risk for severe illness should contact a 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.

- Stay up to date on your COVID-19 vaccines.
 - This is particularly important for older adults and people with certain underlying medical conditions (e.g., heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, and weakened immune systems) as they are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

- Stay home if you are sick to prevent spreading the virus to others. You can return to normal activities when, after 24 hours, the following are both true:
 - Your symptoms have improved overall, AND
 - You have no fever (without the use of fever-reducing medication).
- Take steps for cleaner air at home and elsewhere. This can include opening a window to let in fresh air and maintaining central heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.
- Practice good hygiene.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If water is unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
 - Clean frequently touched surfaces

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 Virginia Department of Health's COVID-19 website at vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/.
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html.

Translations

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