

2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-2019)

Frequently Asked Questions

Page 1 of 4

Under Governor Larry Hogan's direction, state agencies continue to develop comprehensive and coordinated prevention and response plans for the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) will communicate directly with the public, providing updates as this situation develops and accurate information about how to protect yourself and your family.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. This is a new virus that hasn't caused illness in humans before. Worldwide, COVID-19 has resulted in thousands of human infections, causing illness and in some cases death. Currently, most of these infections are in China and South Korea, with increasing numbers of cases now being reported in Japan, Italy and Iran. This situation will change as this virus continues to spread. As of this week, cases have now been reported in at least 37 countries. Experts have expressed concern that COVID-19 will spread worldwide.

Has COVID-19 spread to the U.S.?

In the United States, there have been a small but growing number of people who have become ill with COVID-19. Some are people who have returned from areas in China where COVID-19 was common. Other people have become ill through close contact with someone who had COVID-19. Close contact means being within about six feet of a person with COVID-19 for an extended period. People who live in the same home or are caring for someone who is ill with COVID-19 are particularly vulnerable.

Currently, U.S. cases are related to international travel. However, experts anticipate the number of cases in the U.S. will increase through person-to-person transmission, as it has in other communities in countries with no direct connection with travel to China.

What is the risk to the public right now?

As of today, the risk to the American public is low. Experts say this could change if current efforts to contain the virus outside of the U.S. are unsuccessful.



Maryland
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

For up-to-date resources and information:

Visit health.maryland.gov/coronavirus

Could COVID-19 get worse?

COVID-19 has not spread throughout communities in the U.S. at this time. Community “spread” is how the common cold and flu are transmitted — meaning people catch it from each other while going about their daily lives. Right now, there has been no community spread of COVID-19 in the U.S. Experts say in the coming weeks and months, we can expect to see more cases in the U.S. and worldwide.

Does anyone in Maryland have this new virus now?

No. Two people have been tested and those tests were negative.

Who is at risk right now?

Currently, people are at risk who:

- Recently traveled to China
- Have close, personal contact with those recent travelers
- Have close, personal contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19
- Care for people with COVID-19

Should I cancel plans to travel abroad?

Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are warning travelers to avoid all nonessential travel to China and South Korea. They also advise people who are elderly and those with chronic medical conditions to avoid nonessential travel to Japan, Italy and Iran. As more countries report community spread of COVID-19, the number of countries added to the travel advisory list may increase.

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is spread just like colds or flu through:

- Coughing and sneezing, which creates respiratory droplets
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- Fever
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- In more severe cases, pneumonia (infection in the lungs)

What should I do if I think I am sick with COVID-19?

If you have traveled to China or were in contact with someone with COVID-19, and you become sick with fever, cough or have difficulty breathing, seek medical care right away. Follow these steps:

- Call your doctor or emergency room before you go
- Tell them about recent travel and close contacts (such as people in your household)
- Wear a mask, if one is available

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If someone has COVID-19, what will happen to them?

The vast majority of people recover from this infection. Close to 80 percent of people will have mild or moderate symptoms. Some people may be advised to recover at home and isolate themselves from others. These individuals should call their physicians or health care practitioners if their symptoms get worse.

Some COVID-19 infections can lead to serious illness, and in some cases death. If someone develops a more serious illness from COVID-19, they may be admitted to the hospital. Older people and those with pre-existing medical conditions have a greater risk for serious illness. Examples of pre-existing conditions are: cancer, diabetes, heart disease or other conditions impacting the ability of body's immune system to fight germs.

Should I wear a face mask when I go out in public?

No. Currently the risk to Maryland residents remains low, and face masks are not recommended for the general public. There is no community spread of COVID-19 in the state at this time. Masks can be useful in some settings, such as in a hospital or clinic waiting room, to prevent someone who has a respiratory illness from spreading it to others.

What can I do to protect myself and others?

Take everyday preventive steps that are always recommended to slow the spread of respiratory illnesses like colds and flu:

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol if soap and water are not available
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, your sleeve or your elbow
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using standard cleaning practices
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- If you are sick, stay home, except when seeking medical care

Is there a vaccine or medicine I can get for COVID-19?

Not yet, because COVID-19 is a new disease. However, many experts are at work developing one. As with any new vaccine, it must be tested to make certain it is safe and effective. It may take more than a year for a COVID-19 vaccine to become readily available.

There also is no specific medicine currently available to cure COVID-19. However, people who have COVID-19 should seek medical care to help lessen the severity of their symptoms.

How can I be more prepared for COVID-19?

- Have an adequate supply of nonprescription drugs and other health supplies on hand, which could include pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fluid with electrolytes and vitamins
- Check your regular prescription drugs to make sure you have an adequate supply; refill your prescriptions if needed
- Have a thermometer, tissues and hand sanitizer in case you become ill and must stay at home to recover
- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick and what will be needed to care for them at home
- Have a two-week supply of water and food available at home

Is there anything else I should know?

- Do not stigmatize people of any specific ethnicities or racial background. People who have not recently traveled to China or other affected regions and have not had close contact with a person who is ill with COVID-19 are at no greater risk of this disease than you. Viruses do not target people from specific populations, ethnicities, or racial backgrounds.
- Stay informed and seek information from reliable, official sources. Be wary of myths, rumors and misinformation circulating online and elsewhere. Health information shared through social media is frequently inaccurate, unless coming from an official, reliable source, such as the CDC, MDH or local health departments.

The MDH website provides updated information about COVID-19 at health.maryland.gov/coronavirus.

The CDC has current information at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

To receive the weekly CDC email newsletter about COVID-10, enter your email address, and type COVID-19 in the search box at this link: https://tools.cdc.gov/campaignproxyservice/subscriptions.aspx?topic_id=USCDC_2067.



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