



The coronavirus – what we know for now

Although news about the new coronavirus outbreak is changing rapidly, this is what we know to date.....

The new coronavirus has been declared a global emergency by the World Health Organization, as the outbreak continues to spread outside China.

"The main reason for this declaration is not what is happening in China but what is happening in other countries," said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. The concern is that it could spread to countries with weaker health systems. Initial human trials are a success, larger trials would follow, ideally in an outbreak setting in China "by the end of the year". It is impossible to predict whether this outbreak is likely to have ended by then. But if timelines go to plan it will be the quickest a new vaccine has ever been developed and tested in an outbreak situation. Temperature screening will also need to be conducted at all ports of entry and Hospitals will need to be earmarked as centres to deal with coronavirus.

What exactly is the coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that infect the human respiratory tract and are actually relatively common. Most coronaviruses are not dangerous, but some, like the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 are quite serious and can be fatal if not properly managed. Every so often viruses change their molecular structure and mutate, and this is what has happened with the current coronavirus outbreak.

In December 2019, there was an outbreak of a new respiratory virus (a mutation of the coronavirus) and on 8 January 2020, a new coronavirus "2019-novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)" was identified in a group of people in Wuhan, China. This area has subsequently been acknowledged as the epicentre of the outbreak. The virus—which appears to have come from a live food market in Wuhan, initially moved from animals to humans, who presented with a chest infection — has spread rapidly among people ever since. As of yesterday, There are already over 12, 500 confirmed cases and so far and 305 people in China are known to have died from the virus.

How is it contracted?

- ⊗ Coughing and sneezing
- ⊗ Contact with infected people or things they've touched (doorknobs, phones)
- ⊗ Contact with infected animals

What are the symptoms?

- ⊗ Headache/ fever
- ⊗ Runny nose
- ⊗ Sore throat
- ⊗ Cough
- ⊗ Shortness of breath

**For people with a weakened immune system, the virus can cause more serious respiratory illness like pneumonia or bronchitis.*

Where is it most likely to spread?

According to health24.com, British researchers have mapped out which international cities are most vulnerable to its spread. While the greatest risk for infection are the cities of Bangkok, Hong Kong and Taipei, that doesn't mean other cities around the world are safe. New York City and London are among the 30 cities most likely to see coronavirus infections, according to a team of experts in population mapping (known as WorldPop) at the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom.

The three countries/regions worldwide most at risk are Thailand, Japan and Hong Kong. The United States is 6th on the list, Australia is 10th and the United Kingdom is 17th. In mainland China, the cities of Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Chongqing, and the provinces of Guangdong, Zhejiang, Sichuan and Henan are high risk, the researchers said.

Although cases are popping up in different places around the world due to people travelling, governments have increased their surveillance measures. The Chinese have shut down Wuhan and put in place some impressive quarantine processes, which has helped to curb the spread of the disease.

How can I decrease my risk of getting it?

To help prevent or treat an infection, do the same things you would do for the common cold:

- ⊗ Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water (a few times a day)
- ⊗ Use alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- ⊗ Get plenty of rest
- ⊗ Drink fluids
- ⊗ Take over-the-counter medication for a sore throat and fever
- ⊗ Avoid close contact with people who are infected or have acute respiratory infections

Are there any specific medicines to prevent or treat the new coronavirus

To date, there is no specific medicine recommended to prevent or treat the new coronavirus. However, those infected with the virus should receive appropriate care to relieve and treat systems, and those with severe illness should receive optimized supportive care.

Does the new coronavirus affect older people, or are younger people also susceptible?

People of all ages can be infected by the new coronavirus. Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus.

"Although the coronavirus has been remarkably well contained so far and has not spread into Africa (yet), it is important to be aware of the symptoms and know all the facts about the coronavirus – particularly if you travel a lot.

Obviously, if you can avoid travelling to infected areas (or avoid travelling at all), that is first prize. If this is not realistic, it is important to note that there is no cure or vaccine for the coronavirus. If you have to travel, take the necessary hygiene precautions, stay away from people who are unwell, and be aware of any symptoms you might have. If you are at all worried that you might have contracted the coronavirus, make an appointment with your doctor or go to your nearest hospital immediately."

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