



2019 Novel Coronavirus

Updated February 28, 2020: Information is still evolving rapidly and BPHC will update this information as new and relevant information becomes available.

What is the 2019 novel coronavirus?

The 2019 novel coronavirus (SARS CoV-2, formerly known as 2019-nCoV) causes the disease now called COVID-19. It is a new strain of coronavirus, first detected in Wuhan, China. It has not been previously known to spread in humans. Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses a few of which cause human infection and illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome virus (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome virus (SARS-CoV) are examples of coronaviruses that may cause severe disease.

How is COVID-19 spread?

When the outbreak in Wuhan, China began, many patients reported links to a large seafood and animal market. This suggested that it was spread from animal to people. However, it is now clear that COVID-19 spreads mainly from person to person. It is spread through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land on people who are nearby (within 6 feet). It may also be possible for a person to get COVID-19 by touching a contaminated surface or object and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes.

What are the signs and symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms include fever and respiratory illness, such as cough and difficulty breathing. In severe cases, infection can cause bronchitis, pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death. Symptoms of COVID-19 may be similar to the flu, Preliminary information suggests that older adults and people with underlying health conditions may be at increased risk for severe complications from this virus.

How can COVID-19 be prevented?

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid exposure to the virus. BPHC always recommends standard precautions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Using alcohol-based hand rubs and gels.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- Staying home when you are sick.
- Covering your cough or sneeze.
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces.

If you traveled to a geographic area with widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the last 14 days and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, you should:

- Seek medical care right away. Before you go to a health care provider's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Not travel while sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

For the latest information on the affected geographic areas with widespread or sustained community transmission of COVID-19, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

What can travelers do to protect themselves and others?

The U.S. State Department issued a travel advisory recommending Americans not to travel to areas with widespread transmission of COVID-19. To see which countries are on this list, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>. If you must travel:

- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid animals (alive or dead), animal markets, and products that come from animals (such as uncooked meat).
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Older adults and travelers with underlying health issues may be at risk for more severe disease and should discuss travel destinations with their health care provider.

How is COVID-19 diagnosed?

If you have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 virus and have traveled to an area with widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the past 14 days, your health care provider will test you for the virus. If you experience symptoms and have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 infection, contact your health care provider. Health care providers should get a detailed travel history from patients with fever and acute respiratory illness.

How is COVID-19 treated?

There is no specific antiviral treatment recommended for COVID-19 infection. People infected with COVID-19 should receive supportive care and help to relieve symptoms. People who think they may have been exposed to COVID-19 should contact their health care provider immediately.

BPHC is working closely with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control.

Health care providers in Boston should immediately notify BPHC if they suspect a patient is infected with COVID-19. Providers outside of Boston should contact MDPH at 617-983-6800. CDC has created criteria to guide evaluation of patients suspected to have COVID-19. This can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/clinical-criteria.html>.

