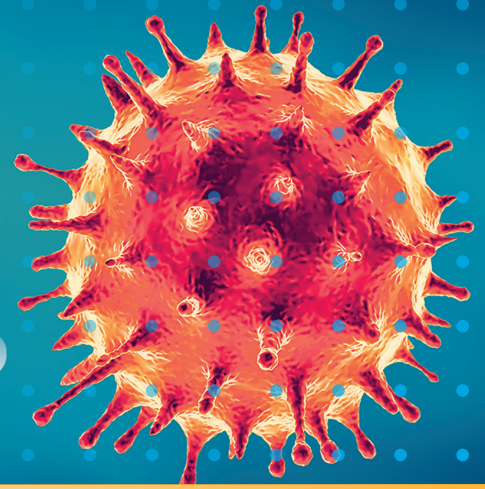




# WHAT IS COVID-19?



## **What is COVID-19?**

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus that was first identified in Wuhan, China.

## **How do you catch COVID-19?**

- It is spread the same way as the flu and other viruses that cause coughs – through ‘droplets’.
  - These are little liquid particles that are sprayed in the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- They can be inhaled by a person who is less than 6 feet away from the infected person and that can cause the second person to get infected.
- It is also possible to become infected by touching a surface that an infected person coughed or sneezed “droplets” onto – those particles can then be transferred to our bodies when we touch our eyes, nose or mouths.

## **How can we avoid COVID-19 infection?**

- Because of how this virus and other “respiratory” viruses (including flu) are spread, covering your coughs and sneezes and asking others to do so is important to prevent infection.
- Performing frequent hand washing or applying hand sanitizer, especially prior to touching your eyes, nose or mouth is also important in preventing infection.
- Limiting touches to eyes, nose, and mouth as much as possible.

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

Symptoms of this virus are very similar to other seasonal respiratory ailments like colds and influenza, or “the flu.” They can include fever, cough, running nose, and difficulty breathing. Importantly, most patients with COVID-19 have only mild-flu-like and respiratory symptoms and do not require hospitalization.

## **How is it diagnosed?**

There is a swab that can be taken and tested for evidence of the virus in the back of the nose or throat in people who have concerning symptoms and exposure.

## **I have some of these symptoms. Can I be tested?**

COVID-19 testing is not right for every patient with respiratory symptoms. Physicians are guided in their testing decisions by each patient’s unique situation and recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s screening guidance. Your doctor can determine whether this type of testing would be necessary.

### **What is the prognosis for people who get COVID-19?**

- Importantly, MOST people with COVID-19 do well, get better, and recover fully within a week or two.
- Even though you may hear “there is no cure,” most people are cured by their own immune system and recover fully. Just like with flu, it may take them a little while to be back to full speed.
- Unlike the flu which can cause severe disease in children, COVID-19 in children appears to be very mild.
- Older people are at highest risk for getting pneumonia and ending up in the hospital from COVID-19.

### **How is it treated?**

- For those who are very sick (due most often to low oxygen levels or pneumonia), hospitalization is required. In the hospital, patients receive oxygen and other treatments as well as supportive care and very close monitoring.
- Most people who are infected do not get low oxygen levels and are able to stay home and monitor themselves for improvement or worsening.
- Infected persons can often have telephone check-ins with health providers to monitor for improvement or worsening.

### **If I have been around someone who I now know is infected, how do I protect myself?**

- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov)) has great advice to help prevent household members from getting infection if someone in the home has COVID-19. These include sleeping in separate rooms and using separate bathrooms if possible as well as frequent handwashing and staying more than 6 feet away from the infected person.
- Let your doctor know right away if you are aware of having contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19. They can help provide more education on how to prevent further risk of infection to you.
- This may require further precautions in your care to prevent us from spreading infection to other patients.

### **I have an upcoming doctor’s appointment. Is it safe for me to go?**

It is important to stay on track with treatments prescribed by your doctor, and to keep any regularly scheduled doctor’s screening visits, screening examinations, vaccinations, and other health care activities. Patients who have specific concerns about their health or personal situation should contact their physicians for more guidance.

If you have respiratory or flu symptoms, please call your doctor’s office ahead of time. Depending on the severity of your symptoms, they may provide special instructions or—if appropriate—connect you with Penn Medicine’s 24/7 online care practice, **Penn Medicine On Demand**, for a virtual visit.