

About COVID-19

Created by the **COVID-19 Health Literacy Project** in collaboration with **Harvard Health Publishing**

What is COVID-19?

- COVID-19 is a contagious respiratory illness.
- This infection is caused by a new coronavirus that was first seen in Wuhan, China.
- Many infected people have mild or no symptoms. Difficulty breathing, pneumonia, organ failure, and death can occur.

How does COVID-19 spread?

- **Person to person:** You can become infected by breathing in an infected person's cough or sneeze droplets from up to 6 feet away
- **Contaminated surfaces:** You can become infected by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. High-risk surfaces include door handles, elevator buttons, counters, cellphones, and surfaces in common areas.

Can I get COVID-19?

- Yes. You may have been exposed if:
 - You live with someone with COVID-19
 - You took care of someone with COVID-19
 - You were in contact with someone with COVID-19
 - You touched a contaminated surface or object
- You may be more likely to get COVID-19 if you traveled recently, are a healthcare worker, or were in a place with many cases.
- You are at risk for more serious symptoms if you have a weak immune system, heart disease, lung disease, or are older than 60.

What are the symptoms?

- **Common symptoms:** dry cough, fever, shortness of breath
- **Less common symptoms:** fatigue, muscle and joint pain, sore throat, headache.

How is COVID-19 different from the flu?

- COVID-19 and the flu cause similar symptoms, but the viruses that cause these illnesses are *different*.
- The virus causing COVID-19 spreads easily and is more likely to cause severe symptoms and death. Unlike the flu, there is currently no vaccine or drug to treat COVID-19.

How can I protect myself and others?

- Avoid close contact or sharing personal items with people who are sick
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash
- Clean surfaces and frequently touched objects
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available
- Stay home and avoid being with people outside of your immediate family



What should I do if I feel sick?

- Stay home and call your doctor. If you are having trouble breathing, suddenly feel drowsy or confused, or notice your lips or face turning blue, call 911.
- Most people with mild symptoms can recover at home. If you must leave home to see a doctor, call beforehand and avoid public transport.

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