COVID-19 - Coronavirus

Introduction

COVID-19 was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The disease is caused by a beta coronavirus named SARS-CoV-2.

COVID-19 usually causes mild to moderate illness. But some cases have resulted in severe illness or death. People with chronic health problems and the elderly are at higher risk.

This reference summary explains COVID-19. It discusses its symptoms, treatment options and prevention methods.

Symptoms & Complications

Many cases of COVID-19 are mild. In fact, some people don't have any symptoms. They may not know they are sick. These are called asymptomatic cases.

When patients do have signs and symptoms, they range from mild to very severe. They may include:

- Cough.
- Fever.
- Difficulty breathing.

Other symptoms may include:

- Chills.
- Muscle aches.
- New inability to taste or smell.
- Sore throat.

Some cases of COVID-19 can be severe or life threatening. This is more likely in people who have long-lasting health problems that are not well controlled. These health problems include:

- Diabetes.
- Heart or lung problems, including moderate or severe asthma.
- Kidney disease that requires dialysis.
- Liver disease.
- Severe obesity.

People with a weakened immune system may also be at higher risk.

People age 65 and older and those living in long-term care facilities or nursing homes are at higher risk of serious illness.

Symptoms usually happen about 2 to 14 days after coming in contact with the virus. People who do not have symptoms can still spread the virus. COVID-19 is known as a contagious disease because it can pass from person to person through talking, sneezing or coughing.

Call your health care provider if you develop symptoms. If you were exposed to someone who has COVID-19, tell your health care provider. Call ahead before going to the health care facility so they can take steps to keep others safe.

Diagnosis

If you think you have COVID-19, call a health care provider right away. To protect others, call the office before you visit. Some public health websites have symptom checkers to help people decide whether they need to seek medical care.
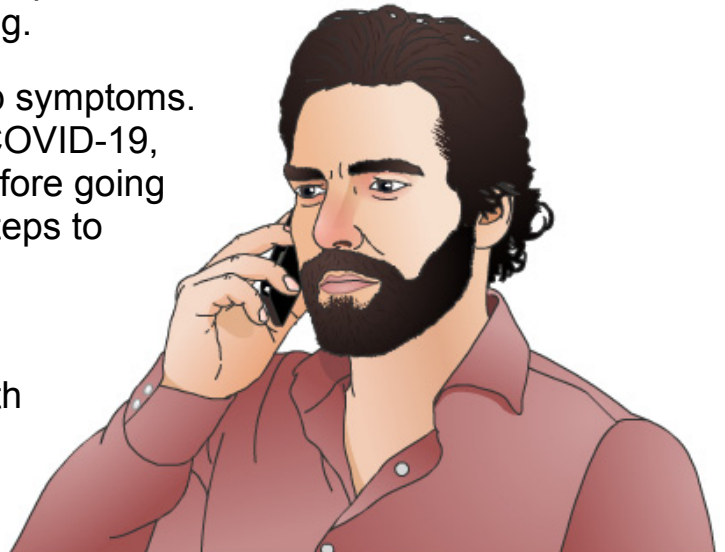
Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms, personal and family medical history and any recent travel. He or she may also perform a physical exam. Tests can help confirm the diagnosis.

You should wear a mask before entering the health care facility and while you are there. Follow any instructions your health care team gives you.

Treatment

There are many treatments being tested for COVID-19. Certain treatments such as medications and breathing support may be used in some cases.

Most people recover on their own. Using a room humidifier or taking a hot shower may help ease coughing.

If you are sick, stay home and rest. You should also drink plenty of fluids. Stay away from other people. To keep others safe, don't leave the house except to visit a health care provider.

Some patients with COVID-19 have developed blood clots. Blood clots happen when blood hardens in the blood vessels. This can block blood flow to important organs. Blood clots in the heart can lead to a heart attack. Blood clots in the brain can lead to a stroke. Blood clots in the lungs can be deadly.

Seek emergency medical care if you have any of the following symptoms:
- Blue face or lips.
- Chest pain or pressure that does not go away.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Sudden confusion.
- Trouble feeling or moving a part of your face or body.
- Trouble speaking.

If a person cannot be awakened, seek emergency medical attention.

Prevention

There are currently no vaccines available to protect against COVID-19.

If there is an outbreak where you live, follow the instructions of your local authorities. Avoid close contact with other people. This is called physical (social) distancing. It helps protect high-risk individuals. It can also help slow the spread of disease, so hospitals don't become overcrowded.

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, recommends keeping a distance of 6 feet (2 meters) between yourself and others for those living in the US.

If you are sick, you can protect others by:
- Avoiding close contact with people and animals.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- Keeping objects and surfaces clean and disinfected.
- Staying home while you are sick.
- Wearing a mask around others and using a separate bathroom and bedroom if possible.

When you are around people who are sick, you should:
- Avoid close contact with them.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid sharing food, drinks or household items with someone who is sick.
- Wear a mask if the person who is sick is not able to wear one.

If you are not sick, follow the recommendations of local authorities on whether you should wear a mask. People with weak immune systems should ask their health care provider if they need a mask and what kind.

Everyone can help prevent the spread of infection by washing their hands often:
1. Wet your hands using clean running water.
2. Scrub your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds. Make sure to clean the top and bottom of your hands, around your thumbs, between your fingers and under your fingernails. Singing "happy birthday" twice is about how long it should take.
3. Use clean running water to rinse off the soap.
4. Use a clean towel to dry your hands and to turn off the faucet.

If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Rub the gel all over your hands until they are dry, about 20 seconds.

Wash your hands before touching your face. Touching a surface with germs on it and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth can make you sick.

Concerns about your wellbeing and that of others can be stressful and exhausting. Practicing healthy habits can improve your mood and help you feel your best. These include:

- Eating well.
- Staying active.
- Getting enough sleep.
- Connecting with loved ones.
- Making time for relaxation and activities you enjoy.

Summary

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Symptoms usually happen about 2 to 14 days after coming in contact with the virus. Symptoms may include:

- Cough.
- Fever.
- Difficulty breathing.

Some patients with COVID-19 have other symptoms or no symptoms at all.

Call your health care provider if you develop symptoms. If you were exposed to someone who has COVID-19, tell your health care provider. To protect others, call the office before you visit.

There are many treatments being tested for COVID-19. Supportive care can help ease symptoms. Most people recover on their own.

If there is an outbreak where you live, follow the instructions of your local authorities. Avoid close contact with other people. This is known as physical (social) distancing. It helps protect high-risk individuals. It can also help slow the spread of disease, so hospitals don't become overcrowded.

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Our knowledge about how to treat and prevent COVID-19 is growing every day. For the most up-to-date information, turn to:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, for those who live in the United States (www.cdc.gov).
- Local health authorities in your area.