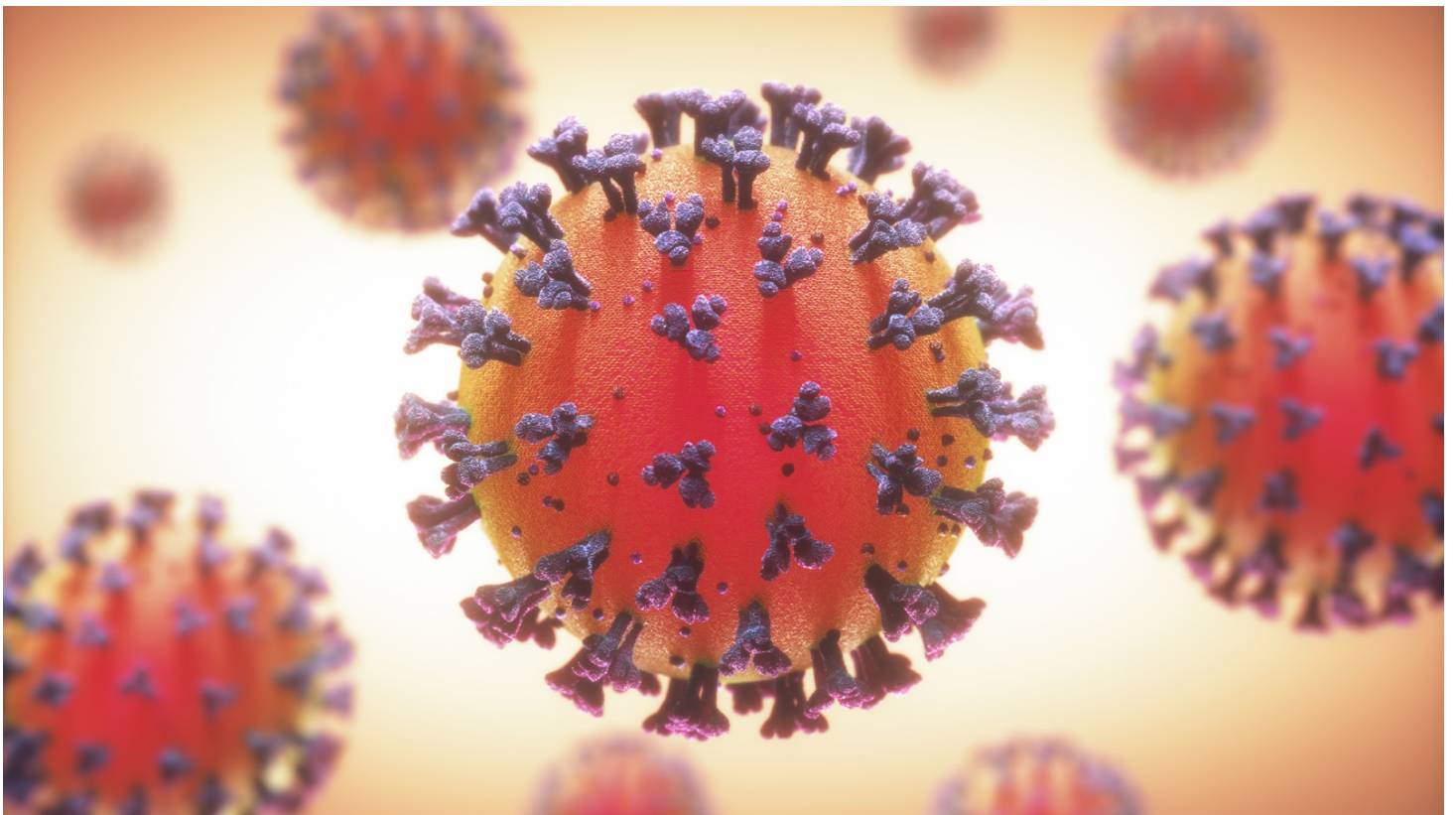# What to Know About Coronavirus—COVID-19 Explained

Monday, March 9, 2020

What is coronavirus?

It has been three years since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is now a familiar term, there are still questions that people may have about this virus and how it works.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that may cause respiratory illnesses in humans ranging from common colds to more severe conditions such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS).[1]

'Novel coronavirus' is a new, previously unidentified strain of coronavirus. The novel coronavirus involved in the current pandemic was discovered in December 2019 in Wuhan, China and was named SARS-CoV-2 by the World Health Organization (WHO). The disease it causes has been named "coronavirus disease 2019" or "COVID-19".[1]

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is transmitted from person to person usually through close contact (within six feet) of each other. The virus is spread through respiratory droplets in the air that come from our mouths when we cough and sneeze. They can also be spread by talking, laughing, and eating. It may also be possible to get the virus by touching a surface or object contaminated with the virus and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.[2]

COVID-19 may be spread by someone before showing any symptoms, mild symptoms, or are asymptomatic (someone who never develops symptoms).

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Similar to other respiratory illnesses, the symptoms of COVID-19 include:[3,4]

Fever and/or chills Body aches and muscle pain Cough Sore throat Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing Extreme tiredness (fatigue) Headaches Runny or stuffy nose Vomiting Diarrhea
People with COVID-19 may experience any range of these symptoms. And there are still other symptoms that may appear that are not included in this list. Symptoms can start to appear anywhere from 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. With COVID-19, patients can begin spreading the virus 2-3 days before showing signs of the virus and up to eight days after symptoms have appeared.[1-4]

How to protect yourself from COVID-19

The best way to protect yourself from COVID-19 is to get vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccines are now available to everyone 6 months and older, with booster doses available for everyone 5 years and older. Most doctor's offices, pharmacies, and health clinics offer COVID-19 vaccines. Find a COVID-19 vaccine near you.[6]

Another way to stay protected from COVID-19 is to avoid exposure to the virus. This means taking some cautionary steps—the same as you would if you were trying to avoid getting any respiratory illness:7

Wash your hands with soap and water frequently. If soap and water are not readily accessible, use alcohol-based sanitizers. Avoid contact with people who are sick. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with your hands if they are unwashed. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow when you sneeze or cough. Make sure to dispose of the tissue immediately. If you are feeling unwell, stay home. When out in public, wear a mask to protect yourself and others.
People age 50 and older, those with certain health conditions and diseases like diabetes (Types 1 and 2), obesity, and those with compromised immune systems are at an increased risk of progressing to severe COVID-19.8

What to do if you suspect you are infected with COVID-19

The symptoms of COVID-19 are very similar to those of a cold or the flu, making it challenging to identify the specific cause of any respiratory symptoms.

If you suspect you have been infected by COVID-19 and are experiencing any symptoms, get tested and/or speak with your doctor. COVID-19 tests are now widely available at local pharmacies, clinics, and hospitals. While waiting for your test results, take extra precautions and limit your exposure to people.

If you test positive, follow these guidelines to reduce your likelihood of infecting others:9

Self-isolate and stay at home as much as you can. If it is feasible, stay in a separate room and use a different bathroom from others in your household. Clean and/or disinfect objects and surfaces that you touch regularly. Track your symptoms as accurately as possible, so you can provide medical personnel with useful information. Stay well-hydrated and get plenty of rest. Take over-the-counter medicines, such as acetaminophen, to help you feel better. Stay in touch with your doctor. Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you have trouble breathing, or have any other emergency warning signs, or if you think it is an emergency.
Are there any treatments or vaccines for COVID-19?

Yes, several different vaccines are available to help prevent COVID-19 and reduce risk of serious illness.

There is a small portion of the population who may not be able to get the COVID-19 vaccine. This might be due to a preexisting medical condition, are receiving treatment for cancer, or are immunocompromised. If you are unsure, talk with your doctor.

In terms of treatment, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved and authorized for emergency use certain oral treatments for mild to moderate COVID-19 for people who are at high risk of getting seriously ill from the virus.

The FDA continues to work with developers, researchers, manufacturers, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and other partners to discover and develop new ways to prevent or treat COVID-19. You can check whether a drug is approved by the FDA, by visiting the Drugs@FDA database.10

The most effective way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 is to get vaccinated, stay boosted, and reduce transmitting it to others if infected. Take the necessary precautions and stay protected.
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