2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19): What You Need to Know
From the Alexandria Health Department

What is Coronavirus Disease 2019? (COVID-19)

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that can make humans and animals sick. Some coronaviruses can cause illnesses similar to the common cold. Others can cause more serious illnesses, including Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

Coronavirus Disease 2019 was first detected in Wuhan, China. It was originally called a "novel" virus because it has never been detected before this outbreak. It is now being called "COVID-19."

Important note: This is a new virus and we are still learning about its characteristics and impact. Refer to the **Virginia Department of Health Coronavirus website for continuously updated information.**

What are COVID-19 symptoms?

Mild to severe respiratory illnesses, with:

Fever	Cough	Sore Throat	Shortness Of Breath

How can you get COVID-19?

In order to be infected with the virus, you need to be exposed to it. Public health experts are still confirming how this new coronavirus spreads.

Other coronaviruses, like the common cold, SARS and MERS, spread person-to-person through:

- Respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes **(this is also how flu spreads).**
- Touching objects or surfaces (such as doorknobs or tables) that have the virus on it from the respiratory droplets mentioned above and then touching your own mouth, nose, or possibly your eyes.
- Close, personal contact with someone who is infectious.

Who is at risk for catching this new virus?

Currently, the virus is not spreading in the U.S., but the likelihood of getting sick from this virus in the U.S. is still low, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Travelers to areas with outbreaks are at risk for catching COVID-19. Right now, U.S. residents who have traveled to Wuhan, and **to a lesser degree, those who have traveled to other parts of China, are at greatest risk of encountering people infected with COVID-19.**

What if I have recently been to Wuhan or other parts of China?

Asymptomatic travelers (**those without** fever, cough, or shortness of breath) who have recently visited outbreak-affected areas should contact **the Alexandria Health Department (AHD)** at 703.746.4934 for monitoring advice.

If you feel sick with fever, develop a cough or have shortness of breath, you should:

- Seek medical care right away. Call your doctor or emergency room before seeking care and tell them about your travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others; do not travel.

How can you protect yourself?

COVID-19, from all current indications, is spread person-to-person, like the common cold and influenza viruses. To protect yourself and others:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Coughing or sneezing into your elbow is better than your bare hands. If you cough or sneeze into your hand, use a tissue; then throw the tissue away and wash your hands.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth to prevent the spread of germs.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as toys and doorknobs, especially if someone is sick.
- If you have not already done so, get immunized against seasonal influenza.
- Avoid non-essential travel to affected areas; **visit CDC.gov/travel for more information.**

What are the AHD and the City of Alexandria doing?

AHD staff regularly updates the hospital and healthcare communities with guidance on how to identify and respond to possible cases. AHD is prepared to monitor persons who have possible exposures to COVID-19. If there are any cases in Alexandria, AHD will follow VDH and CDC guidance.

The City of Alexandria has established a City Coronavirus Workgroup, headed by AHD and comprised of multiple City departments and Inova Alexandria Hospital. The Workgroup is identifying resources and developing processes in the event there are COVID-19 cases in the city.

Visit the Virginia Department of Health's Novel Coronavirus page for the latest information.

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