

2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQ

Updated: 3/5/2020

Q: What is 2019 Novel Coronavirus?

A: 2019 Novel Coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a new respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China.

Q: How does the virus spread?

A: Many of the initial patients in the outbreak had a link to a large seafood and live animal market in Wuhan, China, suggesting animal-to-person spread. However, the virus is now being spread person-to-person. Most often, spread from person-to-person happens among close contacts (about 6 feet), mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

Q: Is COVID-19 the same as other coronaviruses?

A: It is important to understand that there are seven different coronaviruses known to infect humans. Four of the seven coronaviruses are very common, cause milder symptoms (similar to the common cold), and most people will be infected with at least one of these in their lifetime. The other three of the seven coronaviruses are rare and can cause more severe illness; this includes the COVID-19.

Q: How can I help protect myself?

A: People infected with respiratory illness, including coronavirus, can avoid passing it to others by covering their coughs and sneezes, cleaning their hands frequently, and staying home when ill.

Q: Is there a risk for COVID-19 from products or packages shipped from China?

A: People receiving imported goods from China are not at risk of contracting COVID-19. Coronaviruses do not survive long on objects such as letters or packages.

Q: What if I recently traveled to China or Iran and got sick?

A: If you traveled to China or Iran in the past 14 days and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, you should seek medical care right away. Before you go to a healthcare office, call ahead and tell them about your travel and your symptoms.

Q: What is the risk of the COVID-19 to Iowans? Are certain groups of people more likely to be infected with COVID-19 than others?

A: Currently, the risk for COVID-19 is associated with recent travel to a country where community transmission is currently ongoing, not a race or country of origin. Overall, the COVID-19 risk to Iowans remains low at this time.

Q: What is public health in Iowa doing to protect Iowans from COVID-19?

A: CDC notifies IDPH of incoming asymptomatic travelers from China and Iran (symptomatic travelers will be assessed by healthcare providers prior to being released from the airport). Public health then evaluates asymptomatic individuals for risk level and issues public health monitoring orders that outline requirements to report symptoms to public health twice daily and restrictions on daily activities.

Q: Who should I call if I have questions?

A: Please contact the Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE) at (800) 362-2736.