

2020

DISCOVERY HEALTH

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS AND  
SEASONAL INFLUENZA INFECTION

## About coronaviruses and the latest outbreak

### 1. What are coronaviruses?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people.

### 2. What is a novel coronavirus?

A novel coronavirus is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

The 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is a coronavirus identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, China.

### 3. How did the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) spread to humans?

Early on, many of the patients in the outbreak in Wuhan, China reportedly had some link to a large seafood and animal market, suggesting animal-to-person spread. However, a growing number of patients reportedly have not had exposure to animal markets, indicating person-to-person spread is occurring.

### 4. How can you get the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)?

Since this novel coronavirus was only recently identified, there is currently limited information regarding the modes of transmission, clinical features and severity of disease. Human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through:

- The air by coughing and sneezing
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands
- Faecal contamination.

### 5. What are the signs and symptoms of the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)?

There is limited information regarding clinical features, and severity of disease at this stage. For confirmed 2019-nCoV infections, reported illnesses have ranged from infected people with little to no symptoms to people being severely ill and dying. Symptoms can include fever, cough and shortness of breath. Symptoms may appear in as few as two days or as long as 14 days after exposure.

### 6. What is the treatment for the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)?

Treatment is supportive as no specific therapy has been shown to be effective. People who think they may have been exposed to 2019-nCoV should contact their healthcare providers immediately.

### 7. Is there a vaccine for the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)?

There is currently no vaccine to help prevent 2019-nCoV infection. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus.

### 8. Reducing the risk of exposure to the virus

There are certain steps you can take to reduce your exposure to 2019-nCoV:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Cover your mouth and nose with your flexed elbow or a tissue. Throw the tissue away immediately and wash hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are frequently touched.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has a fever and cough.
- Seek medical care early and share your previous travel history with your healthcare provider, especially if you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing.
- When visiting animal markets in areas currently experiencing cases of novel coronavirus, avoid direct unprotected contact with live animals and surfaces in contact with animals.
- Avoid the consumption of raw or undercooked animal products. Handle raw meat, milk or animal organs with care to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods.
- Avoid travel if you have a fever and cough. If you become sick while using public transport, inform the personnel and seek medical care early.

## 9. Who needs to be investigated for possible 2019 novel coronavirus (nCoV) infection?

Any person with the following risk factors should be investigated and tested for 2019-nCoV:

- Severe acute respiratory illness (SARI), presenting with fever ( $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) or history of fever and cough with pneumonia or acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) (based on clinical/X-ray findings) requiring admission to hospital and any of the following:
  - A documented travel history to Wuhan, Hubei Province in China within 14 days before symptom onset
  - Close physical contact with a confirmed patient with 2019-nCoV while they are symptomatic\*
  - Exposure to patients with severe acute respiratory infections, unless another cause has been identified to explain the clinical presentation

OR

- A person with acute respiratory illness (ARI) of any severity, presenting with symptoms within 14 days and being exposed to the following:
  - Close physical contact with a confirmed patient with 2019-nCoV while they are symptomatic\*
  - Exposure to a healthcare facility in a country where hospital-associated 2019-nCoV infections have been reported
  - A documented travel history to Wuhan, Hubei Province in China within 14 days before symptom onset, and visited an animal market in Wuhan City.

\*Close contact includes the following:

- Providing direct care for 2019-nCoV patients
- Being exposed to healthcare workers infected with 2019-nCoV
- Visiting patients or staying in the same close environment as someone infected with 2019-nCoV
- Working in close proximity to someone infected with 2019-nCoV
- Sharing the same classroom environment with someone infected with 2019-nCoV

- Travelling with someone infected with 2019-nCoV in any mode of transport
- Living in the same household as someone infected with nCoV.

## 10. What scheme benefits are available to members with suspected or confirmed coronavirus infection?

- Benefits for both in-hospital and out-of-hospital care will apply according to the different plan types. All tests done during the admission will be covered as part of the admission.
- The NICD laboratory is currently the only dedicated centre for diagnostic testing for the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). The test is currently offered at no cost.
- Members who need to be admitted to hospital can go to any private healthcare facility. The normal preauthorisation processes will apply and you don't need to go to specific facilities.
- If patients need more intensive treatment or medical transfers, existing protocols and escalation channels will apply.

The national Department of Health has identified specific public hospitals that can manage cases of the coronavirus infection in each province. This is based on each hospital's ability to isolate, manage and conduct research on suspected or confirmed cases of the coronavirus. These hospitals are:

- Polokwane Hospital in Limpopo
- Rob Ferreira Hospital in Mpumalanga
- Charlotte Maxeke Hospital, Steve Biko Hospital and Tembisa Hospitals in Gauteng
- Grace Hospital in KwaZulu-Natal
- Klerksdorp Hospital in North West
- Kimberley Hospital in the Northern Cape
- Pelonomi Hospital in the Free State
- Livingstone Hospital in the Eastern Cape
- Tygerberg Hospital in the Western Cape

**NB: There is no requirement for private patients to be channelled to these public sector facilities.**

## 11. How can I tell if I have an 2019-nCoV infection or the seasonal flu?

Signs and symptoms of the 2019 novel coronavirus significantly overlap with those of the flu. This means that it may not be easy to differentiate between the two infections based only on the symptoms and signs.

If you meet the criteria for testing as defined in point 9 above, you will need to be tested for the novel coronavirus.

## 12. What are the differences and similarities between the 2019-nCoV and the flu?

The influenza (or flu) virus has been in existence for a very long time. So, there is a lot of research on how it spreads, who is at risk of severe disease, how it can be prevented and how it can be treated. Little information is currently available on the 2019 novel coronavirus, but research is underway.

A vaccine currently exists for the flu virus, but more research is needed to develop a vaccine for 2019-nCoV.

The same precautionary measures apply for the spread of all coronaviruses, including n-CoV and the flu. See point 8 above.

## Flu and the flu vaccine

### 1. Does the flu vaccine prevent the flu?

Flu vaccination has been proven to be the most effective way of preventing infection and reducing hospital admissions related to flu complications. Flu vaccination continues to offer benefits when given at any time during the flu season, but the ideal time for vaccination is before the season starts. It takes the body about two weeks to develop antibodies against the flu virus.

### 2. When is the best time to have the flu vaccination?

In South Africa, the best time to get your flu vaccination is before the end of April, before the flu season sets in, and before the virus spreads or as soon as the vaccine becomes available. However, if you have missed this period, you can still get vaccinated at any time during the winter season.

### 3. I had the flu vaccination last year. Do I need to get it again?

You may have had a flu vaccination before, but the strains of the flu virus vary every year. Therefore, you should consider getting the vaccination every season to remain protected.

### 4. Can everybody get the flu vaccine?

There are certain circumstances where a person should not have a flu vaccination. This includes people who have had a severe allergic reaction to a flu vaccination in the past and people who have a severe allergy to eggs. Children younger than six months should not have a flu vaccination. If you are unsure or have any questions, you should speak to your healthcare provider to see if you can have a flu vaccination.

### 5. Are there any side effects from having the flu vaccine?

Side effects are usually not serious and will generally disappear on their own in a day or two. The most common side effects are mild pain, and redness and swelling of the skin at the injection site. Other possible side effects include fever, feeling unwell, headaches, and muscle and joint pain.

