

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **1. WHAT IS A CORONAVIRUS?**

Coronaviruses describe a large family of viruses that usually cause mild respiratory illness. But there are some strains of coronaviruses that have caused more severe illness, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). Novel coronavirus 2019 is a new coronavirus and can cause pneumonia. Other terms you may see used to name this virus include: COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, or 2019-nCoV.

### **2. WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF CORONAVIRUS?**

This is a viral respiratory illness. Symptoms include cough, fever, and/or difficulty breathing. The degree of severity of these symptoms varies. This disease can cause pneumonia. There have been deaths from this illness, mainly in the elderly. However, most cases (80%) appear to be mild. People may experience symptoms similar to a cold or the flu.

### **3. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I GET SICK?**

If you have traveled from an area where coronavirus has been spreading, or been in close contact with someone with confirmed novel coronavirus 2019, and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, call your Local Health Department at (361) 826-7200 BEFORE going to get care and tell them about your symptoms and travel. They can provide you instructions for seeking care so that you do not expose others.

There are many causes of fevers, coughs, and other respiratory symptoms. Most clinics have surgical masks that you may be asked to wear while in the clinic. Please protect others and wear a mask if asked. Wash your hands. Cover your cough or sneeze. If you are ill, stay home.

### **4. WHERE DID THIS VIRUS COME FROM AND HOW IS IT SPREAD?**

Like MERS and SARS, COVID-19 closely resembles coronaviruses found in bats but not humans. Scientists believe that the bat virus had a change in its genes that permitted it to spread to humans, possibly via an intermediate carrier (pangolin) in an animal market in Wuhan, China. Early on, it is difficult to know the exact source of the virus, how well it spreads from person to person, and how severe the infection is. The virus can be transmitted from person to person via droplets that come from the nose or mouth when we cough or sneeze. Those droplets can directly enter the nose, mouth or eyes of a person standing close by, or they can be indirectly transmitted by hands and inanimate objects.

Human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through: droplets spread by coughing and sneezing, close personal contact like shaking hands, or touching a wet surface that someone infected with the virus recently through sneezing or coughing, and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes.

## **5. WHAT ARE RISKS FOR GETTING THE VIRUS?**

Nueces County has ZERO confirmed cases at this time.

The potential public health threat posed by COVID-19 is high, both globally and to the United States. However, individual risk is dependent on exposure. The risk to the general public of becoming infected appears to be increasing based on this recent discovery of cases that are not immediately linked to travel, but is not considered high at this time, unless you are in those areas of community-acquired transmission.

People who have traveled from an affected country or geographic area in the last 14 days or who are close contacts of someone with a confirmed case of the 2019 novel coronavirus are at higher risk. There have been cases that appear to be community-transmitted within the U.S. rather than linked to travel.

There are travel alerts for China, South Korea, Japan, Iran and Italy. The list of countries with coronavirus-related alerts may change and people are encouraged to check CDC travel alerts at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>. Travelers from affected areas are advised to self-monitor for 14 days and, if they develop symptoms like a fever, cough or difficulty breathing, they should self-isolate and seek medical guidance by calling their Local Health Department (LHD). Contacts of presumptive positive or confirmed cases are being contacted by public health officials and are asked to stay home, away from others and self-monitor for symptoms, as well.

The federal government on February 29 announced additional travel restrictions for Iran and additional screening for travelers returning from South Korea and Italy. Restrictions and screenings already were in place for travelers from China. The situation around travel may change quickly as the response to this virus evolves.

This is an evolving situation and the Nueces County Public Health District's role and guidance may change (sometimes rapidly) with the passage of time, a change in circumstances, and/or release of updated guidelines from DOH and CDC.

## **6. HOW MANY COVID-19 CASES ARE THERE IN NUECES COUNTY?**

We will provide updates as needed on our website at <https://www.ctexas.com/departments/health-district>.

## **7. IS THERE A VACCINE FOR 2019 CORONAVIRUS?**

At this time, there is no vaccine for COVID-19. Efforts are underway to develop a vaccine. However, it is not clear that an effective vaccine will emerge in time to have an impact on this epidemic. Until that time, we must proceed as though it will not be available.

You can help prevent the spread of illness by washing hands often with soap and running water, staying home if you are sick, avoiding close contact with others who are sick, covering your coughs or sneezes with a tissue, and cleaning and disinfecting objects and surfaces regularly.

## **8. WHO SHOULD BE TESTED?**

Texas recently established testing for the coronavirus at 19 locations across the state, so the capacity and timeline for testing has improved. The criteria for being considered a person under investigation (PUI) for coronavirus has changed and may continue to change, and that criteria outlines who should be tested.

More information is available from the CDC at [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-criteria.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-criteria.html). Local health officers also have the authority to request testing, and the Corpus-Christi-Nueces County Public Health District works in coordination with medical providers in Nueces County on novel illnesses like this coronavirus as well as other notifiable conditions.

It is important that people who are not ill do not go to a clinic or hospital seeking coronavirus testing. If you are ill and believe you may have been exposed to coronavirus, call ahead to your medical provider before coming in. If testing is needed, providers coordinate with the Health District.

People who are ill only with mild cold symptoms also should NOT immediately go to a clinic, hospital or the Health District seeking coronavirus testing. Doing so displaces other patients who truly need urgent care and increases the risk of spread of respiratory infections in health care settings. Furthermore, there is little personal health value in pursuing COVID-19 testing of patients who are not severely ill or part of a public health investigation. Testing for COVID-19 remains finite in capacity and is triaged toward patients who are severely ill, are health care providers with potential exposure, or who are part of a public health investigation.

## **9. HOW LONG IS SOMEONE CONTAGIOUS?**

We are still learning about this disease, which first was identified in China in December 2019. Based on our current understanding, symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure, and people are believed to be most contagious when they are symptomatic. This means someone who is infected is most likely to spread the illness when they are actively coughing or sneezing, have a fever or shortness of breath.

It is possible for people to spread the illness when they have mild symptoms or no symptoms. For confirmed or presumptive positive cases who are isolated at home during recovery, they are not released from isolation until two follow-up tests have come back negative, showing that the virus is no longer present. Samples are taken from swabs of the mouth and nose. This may take several weeks.

It is possible that an undetected case who self-isolates because they were exposed or are not feeling well could be contagious after their symptoms resolve. Transmission would be less likely when they don't have symptoms compared to when they are actively symptomatic, which is why the LHD encourages anyone who has symptoms to stay home and avoid contacts with others.

## **10. HOW CAN I PREPARE?**

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of standard prevention steps for respiratory illness. Continue to practice those. Increase frequency of handwashing, make sure you are cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces, and stay home if you are ill.

All of these are key for slowing the spread of illness. Masks are not recommended as a prevention strategy for people who are well in the general public. Medical providers have specific guidance on masks and personal protective equipment and should follow that guidance.

Take many of the same steps to prepare for an outbreak as you would to prepare for other emergencies, such as a hurricane:

- Make an emergency plan of action with your household members, relatives, and friends.
- Know your workplace's sick leave policies and whether you can work remotely.
- Decide who will pick up and watch children if schools or childcare facilities are closed, or if children get sick.
- Have emergency supplies like nonperishable food, water, personal hygiene supplies, and medicine or other medical supplies in an accessible emergency kit – enough to last your household for at least 14 days.
- Include a list of emergency contacts as well as a list of medical conditions and medications for household members.

If the disease enters our community, public events, schools, or other gatherings may be canceled. Please respect these decisions. This is known as social distancing, which helps to reduce the spread of illness.

For those with respiratory illness of any kind, including both the flu and coronavirus, set up a separate room in the household for someone who is sick and clean the room regularly. Clean, disposable facemasks may be useful for the individual who is sick, not for the well members of the household.

Know your neighbors or friends in the area and be ready to support each other during an emergency. Check in on those who live alone or have underlying health conditions and may need extra support. If you live alone, talk to your friends and family members about who would be available to check in on you by phone if you become sick.

Through all of this, remember to stay calm, prepared and informed. Check reliable sources for updates and follow the advice of public health professionals.

## **11. WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE IMMUNOCOMPROMISED?**

People who have underlying conditions or are otherwise immunocompromised are at higher risk from this illness, as well as other illnesses like the flu. Avoiding contact with ill people is crucial. As illness spreads, consider options for social distancing, such as working remotely.

If a household member of someone who is immunocompromised is suspected of having or confirmed to have coronavirus, the CDC instructs health care professionals and local public health staff to assess isolation options for the COVID-19 patient outside of the home so that they are not in proximity to the immunocompromised household member.

If you do not have an ill household member but are immunocompromised, talk to your health care provider about what steps you should take to protect yourself. While masks are not recommended for the general public as a preventive measure, a health care provider may suggest that someone with a

particularly vulnerable immune system wear a mask. Please follow your health care provider's guidance and keep in mind that masks are not the best option for everyone with a vulnerable immune system.

Now is also a good time to learn what options your health care provider may have for remote consultations, by phone or online. This can help you get your questions answered before going into a clinic, thereby minimizing exposure to this virus as well as other illnesses.

## **12. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I GET SICK? (Make this number 3)**

If you have traveled from an area where coronavirus has been spreading, or been in close contact with someone with confirmed novel coronavirus 2019, and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, call your Local Health Department BEFORE going to get care and tell them about your symptoms and travel. They can provide you instructions for seeking care so that you do not expose others.

There are many causes of fevers, coughs, and other respiratory symptoms. Most clinics have surgical masks that you may be asked to wear while in the clinic. Please protect others and wear a mask if asked. Wash your hands. Cover your cough or sneeze. If you are ill, stay home.

## **13. SHOULD I STAY HOME FROM WORK OR KEEP MY KIDS HOME FROM SCHOOL?**

People with symptoms such as cough, fever, and/or difficulty breathing, or who have been contacted by public health because they are a close contact of a confirmed or presumptive positive case, should stay home from work, school and other activities. If you have specific questions about your symptoms or care, contact your medical provider by phone before going to a clinic or other health care facility.

Those who have not been contacted by public health and who do not currently have symptoms or close contact with a case should assume that their exposure is no greater than other members of the general public. They may continue to attend work and school, and should support efforts to reduce the spread of illness, which may include more frequent cleaning or sending people home if they are sick.

Continue to monitor messages from your school district, childcare facility and the Corpus Christi-Nueces County Public Health District for updated guidance or instructions.

## **14. WHY AREN'T SCHOOLS CLOSED?**

Closing schools when there has not been a confirmed case in a student or staff member is not currently recommended by the Corpus Christi-Nueces County Public Health District, the Texas Dept. of State Health Services or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Corpus Christi-Nueces County Public Health District will continue to provide guidance to the school districts in Nueces County and will provide subject matter experts.

## **15. ARE PUBLIC EVENTS BEING CANCELED?**

At this time, the Corpus Christi-Nueces County Public Health District is not recommending closures of schools and public venues. However, as always during flu season, residents 60 years and older, and those with underlying medical conditions or weakened immune systems are urged to avoid large public gatherings. It is still flu season and everyone age 6 months and older should get their flu vaccine.

#### **16. ARE THERE ANY PUBLIC LOCATIONS TO AVOID?**

In the event of a confirmed case, the Corpus Christi-Nueces County Public Health District will notify the community.

It is important to understand how this disease is spread to understand possible future warnings. Coronaviruses like COVID-19 spread primarily among close contacts. They are spread through respiratory droplets when people cough or sneeze, or by touching a surface where the virus has been shed through coughing or sneezing and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes. This is different from an airborne virus like measles, where we would release locations of general exposure.

If a case of COVID-19 is confirmed or presumptive positive in someone at a local school, workplace or other facility, there will be additional communications from the affected facility to notify students, staff and families. The Corpus Christi-Nueces County Public Health District is coordinating with local partners on providing information and guidance.

#### **17. IS IT SAFE TO TRAVEL INTERNATIONALLY?**

Prior to any trip, be sure to check CDC travel notices at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>. China and other countries have been listed at a level 3 warning, which means to avoid nonessential travel, or a level 2 warning to practice enhanced precautions while traveling. The list of countries with travel notices, as well as the level of a country's notice, are constantly being updated.

If you are ill, avoid travel. If you are planning trips, be prepared to cancel non-essential travel to level 3 areas and monitor alerts as the situation changes.

#### **18. IF I (OR SOMEONE I KNOW) HAS BEEN TO CHINA OR ANOTHER AFFECTED AREA RECENTLY, WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

If you traveled to a country with a travel alert related to coronavirus, or if you have been in close contact with someone who has confirmed with novel coronavirus 2019 and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, you should:

- Contact your Local Health Department immediately for guidance. Your LHD will assist you in seeking medical care. Before you go to the doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Do not travel while sick.

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing. If you use your hands, wash your hands immediately after sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

## **19. HOW IS THIS VIRUS TREATED?**

The vast majority (at least 80%) of people with COVID-19 recover just with their own immune response. Treatment is supportive care for symptoms, fluid intake, and isolation/observation. About 10-20% of cases appear to have severe enough disease to require hospitalization. Those patients also receive supportive care and treatment for complications of the infection (pneumonia, problems breathing, etc.). One experimental anti-viral treatment is being studied in China, but its effectiveness has not yet been demonstrated, and is not currently available.

## **20. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

Visit [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html). Follow the Corpus Christi-Nueces County Public Health District on social media (<https://twitter.com/cityofcc>, <https://www.facebook.com/citygov/>).

For additional questions call the state hotline 1-877-570-9779, Monday-Friday, 7 a.m. – 6 p.m.

There currently is no vaccine for COVID-19.

There currently is no treatment for COVID-19.