



MedStar Health

COVID-19 Fact Sheet

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019. Prior to COVID-19, two other coronaviruses (SARS, MERS) were known to cause more serious lower respiratory infection (pneumonia).

How the virus spreads

COVID-19 is a new disease and we are still learning how it spreads. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet)
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes

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 mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

Symptoms

Symptoms can range from mild to severe illness. The most common symptoms are fever and/or cough or shortness of breath. Symptoms may develop as soon as two days to as long as seven days after exposure to the virus.

Approximately 85% of patients recover well from the infection and experience an illness similar to the common cold or influenza. However, approximately 15% of patients require hospitalization and a small percentage of those become critically ill.

Medical diagnosis

Unfortunately, the clinical appearance of COVID-19 cannot be distinguished from other respiratory infections, such as influenza, and thus the diagnosis relies on a laboratory test. Currently, testing involves nasal or oral swabs and samples are sent to the local health department for testing. In the future, it is anticipated that testing will be more widely available.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for COVID-19. Patients with a mild illness can self-care at home, similar to influenza, including drinking lots of fluids, resting and taking pain and fever medication. If symptoms worsen, medical care might be needed. Patients requiring hospitalization will likely receive supplemental oxygen and other supportive measures to help relieve symptoms.

There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19.

Hand hygiene and other preventive measures

The best way to prevent illness is to follow everyday habits that help prevent the spread of infection, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water or use hand sanitizer
- Don't touch your mouth, nose or eyes, especially with unwashed hands
- Stay home if you are sick
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing—DON'T cough or sneeze into your hands
- Regularly clean and disinfect high-touch objects in your home, car and workplace

For healthcare workers, additional steps involve the rapid identification and isolation of patients with respiratory tract infection symptoms. In addition, when caring for patients with suspected or proven COVID-19, healthcare workers should wear the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Seeking medical care

If you believe you may have symptoms of Coronavirus and need medical attention, call your doctor or use MedStar eVisit, a convenient way to receive prompt health care from your computer or mobile device. These options can help determine whether you can be cared for at home, while preventing the potential of exposing others to the virus by visiting a MedStar location.

MedStar eVisit is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Enroll at [MedStar-eVisit.com](https://www.medstar-evisit.com) or download the free iOS or Android mobile app, MedStar eVisit, from the App Store.

If you must visit a MedStar Health Urgent Care location; call the urgent care location **before** seeking care and explain your symptoms. This approach will help our healthcare providers take precautions to protect patients and associates.

Emergency Departments should only be used for true medical emergencies. If you must visit the Emergency Department, call ahead to alert the staff that you may have symptoms of Coronavirus.