

# Coronavirus Update

**Date: March 12, 2020**

## **What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

### **1. What is the source of the Virus?**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause illness in people, and others, such as canine and feline coronaviruses, only infect animals. Rarely, animal coronaviruses that infect animals have emerged to infect people and can spread between people. This is suspected to have occurred for the virus that causes COVID-19. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) are two other examples of coronaviruses that originated from animals and then spread to people.

### **2. What is community spread?**

Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected.

### **3. Can the virus that causes COVID-19 be spread through food, including refrigerated or frozen food?**

Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food. Before preparing or eating food it is important to always wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds for general food safety. Throughout the day wash your hands after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing, or going to the bathroom.

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

In general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient, refrigerated, or frozen temperatures.

### **4. When is someone infectious?**

The onset and duration of viral shedding and period of infectiousness for COVID-19 are not yet known. It is possible that SARS-CoV-2 RNA may be detectable in the upper or lower respiratory tract for weeks after illness onset, similar to infection with

MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV. However, detection of viral RNA does not necessarily mean that infectious virus is present. Asymptomatic infection with SARS-CoV-2 has been reported, but it is not yet known what role asymptomatic infection plays in transmission. Similarly, the role of pre-symptomatic transmission (infection detection during the incubation period prior to illness onset) is unknown. Existing literature regarding SARS-CoV-2 and other coronaviruses (e.g. MERS-CoV, SARS-CoV) suggest that the incubation period may range from 2–14 days.

**5. Can the coronavirus live on soft surfaces like fabric or carpet? What about hard surfaces?**

How long the new coronavirus can live on a soft surface — and more importantly, how easy or hard it is to spread this way — isn't clear yet. So far, available evidence suggests it can be transmitted less easily from soft surfaces than frequently-touched hard surfaces, such as a doorknob or elevator button.

According to the WHO, coronaviruses may survive on surfaces for just a [few hours or several days](#), although many factors will influence this, including surface material and weather.

That's why [personal preventive steps](#) like frequently washing hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and wiping down often-touched surfaces with disinfectants or a household cleaning spray, are a good idea.

**6. Is it likely that people get Coronavirus and won't know it? Is it possible that symptoms will be similar to a bad cold?**

There is a wide a range of symptoms that one can experience if infected with COVID-19. We are still learning about the full range of these symptoms. At this time, we believe that patients can experience everything from not being fully aware of an infection to symptoms similar to a 'bad cold', and more severe symptoms requiring hospitalization.

**7. What is the duration of the virus?**

The length of infection can vary based on each individual and the severity of the infection.

**8. Would we expect to see relief from the spread in the summer months? Why are people less likely to get sick in the summer? Why do viruses thrive in the winter?**

It is not yet known whether weather and temperature impact the spread of COVID-19. Some other viruses, like the common cold and flu, spread more during cold weather months but that does not mean it is impossible to become sick with these viruses during other months. At this time, it is not known whether the spread of COVID-19 will decrease when weather becomes warmer. There is much more to learn about the transmissibility, severity, and other features associated with COVID-19 and investigations are ongoing.

**9. Is there a vaccine available for COVID-19? If not, how much time will it take to develop a vaccination?**

No vaccine is currently available, although scientists are working on vaccines. It could take between a year and 18 months to develop.

**10. What if a spouse or child is showing any viral symptoms? Do we need to report it to you as well as stay home?**

No. It is not necessary to report to Occ Health or stay home should a spouse or child show viral symptoms unless they are at risk of or known to have COVID-19.

**11. While there is much concern related to COVID-19 and the media has consistently emphasized the importance of social distancing and isolation, it is important to understand current public health guidance related to individuals with community exposure to COVID-19. All Partners affiliates closely follow public health guidance related to COVID-19, including that from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Mass Department of Public Health. The following considerations related to household members with exposure to COVID-19 are important to understand:**

- Per CDC, “contacts of contacts” are not considered exposed to COVID-19.
- CDC does not recommend testing, symptom monitoring or special management for people exposed to asymptomatic people with potential exposures to COVID-19.
- People who are exposed to individuals with confirmed COVID-19 are required to do symptom monitoring for 14 days.
- People who are being managed as asymptomatic who develop signs or symptoms compatible with COVID-19 will be managed by the Public Health Department. Household members may, at this time, be considered exposed and quarantined.

**12. Someone I live with has confirmed COVID-19, but I am not showing symptoms. Should I stay home from work?**

Yes, you should refrain from coming into work until you have consulted with your health care provider and Occupational Health. It is important that the family member stay in a separate room, not share a bathroom with others, if possible, not prepare food for others, and that you do not share personal items or food with the infected family member. Hand washing and cleaning common surfaces is also an important means of decreasing the risk of infection depending upon public health assessment.