

# Background Information About COVID-19



By HFCM Communicatie - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0 | <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=89178618>

## ORIGINS OF THE DISEASE

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Currently, scientists believe that the disease originated in Asia. Some of the first reports of this disease came at the end of 2019, when, on December 31, 2019, the World Health Organization's (WHO) Country Office in the People's Republic of China picked up a media statement by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission from their website on cases of "viral pneumonia" in Wuhan. The Country Office notified the International Health Regulations (IHR) focal point in the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office about the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission's media statement of the cases and provided a translation of it. WHO's Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources (EIOS) platform also picked up a media report on ProMED (a program of the International Society for Infectious Diseases) about the same cluster of cases of "pneumonia of unknown cause" in Wuhan.

## NUMBER OF CASES/DEATHS

Since then, COVID-19 has turned into a pandemic, with countries around the world struggling to contain the virus and working to find a vaccine for it. Approximately 235 countries have reported cases. As of mid-October 2020, there have been 7,894,768 cases of COVID-19 and 216,025 deaths in the United States alone. Worldwide, there are have been 38,394,169 cases and 1,089,047 deaths.

## THINGS WE CAN DO TO REDUCE RISK

There is cause for concern as we as individuals go through our daily lives. But that doesn't mean that we should despair. There are many scientifically proven ways to protect ourselves and our families. According to WHO and other health organizations, scientists, and doctors, if you do these things, you can reduce the risk of catching the virus:

## Keep Yourself and Others Safe

---

- » Wear a mask
- » Maintain at least a six-foot (one-meter) distance between yourself and others when out in public
- » Wash your hands frequently
- » Wash your hands before you put your mask on, as well as before and after you take it off

## Made Your Environment Safer

---

- » Avoid the 3Cs: spaces that are closed, crowded, or involve close contact
- » Meet people outside
- » Avoid crowded or indoor settings

## Maintain the Basics of Good Hygiene

---

- » Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water
- » Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- » Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze
- » Clean and disinfect surfaces frequently especially those which are regularly touched

## If You Feel Unwell

---

- » Know the full range of symptoms of COVID-19
- » Stay home and self-isolate even if you have minor symptoms such as cough, headache, or mild fever, until you recover
- » If you have a fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention immediately
- » Keep up to date on the latest information from trusted sources, such as WHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

## DOES WEARING A MASK REALLY HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19?

Most scientists and public health officials believe that wearing a mask is one of the most important things we can do to try to lessen the spread of COVID-19. And there have been some studies that provide evidence for this belief. For example, a recent study published in Health Affairs compared the COVID-19 growth rate before and after mask mandates in 15 states and the District of Columbia. It found that mask mandates led to a slowdown in the daily COVID-19 growth rate, which became more apparent over time. The first five days after a mandate, the daily growth rate slowed by 0.9 percentage-points compared to the five days prior to the mandate; at three weeks, the daily growth rate had slowed by 2 percentage-points.

Another study looked at coronavirus deaths across 198 countries and found that those with cultural norms or government policies favoring mask-wearing had lower death rates.

Two compelling case reports also suggest that masks can prevent transmission in high-risk scenarios. In one case, a man flew from China to Toronto and subsequently tested positive for COVID-19. He had a dry cough and wore a mask on the flight, and all 25 people closest to him on the flight tested negative for COVID-19. In another case, in late May, two hair stylists in Missouri had close contact with 140 clients while sick with COVID-19. Everyone wore a mask and none of the clients tested positive.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU GET SICK?

All of us are feeling anxious about the pandemic and what could happen to us if we get sick. However, children can feel especially anxious during this time. It would help them feel less anxiety if you can talk to them calmly about the illness and what they could expect if they were to get it.

Children often don't get very sick from this virus, but some can, and adults can show a variety of symptoms, including:

- » Cough
- » Fever or chills
- » Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- » Muscle or body aches
- » Sore throat
- » New loss of taste or smell
- » Diarrhea
- » Headache
- » New fatigue
- » Nausea or vomiting
- » Congestion or runny nose

If you do get sick with COVID-19, you should take steps to help yourself get better and help protect your family and friends. You should stay in one room away from other people in your home as much as possible. Also, use a separate bathroom if one is available.

If you have to be in the same room as other people, you should wear a face mask. If you cannot wear a face mask (for some, face masks may cause trouble breathing), people who live with you should not be in the same room as you. If they do enter your room, they should wear a face mask.

You should also practice good hygiene, including washing your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds and coughing or sneezing into your elbow or a tissue (and then throwing the tissue away).

You—or someone else—should keep your house clean and sanitized.

## THINGS YOU CAN DO TO COPE/CARE FOR YOURSELVES

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the exposure

of children and families to trauma, stress, and substance use disorders. However, there are things you and your family can do to cope with these things and care for each other. Below are some suggestions for what you can do to cope and care for yourself.

### 1. Take Care of Your Health

It is especially important during this pandemic to take care of your health. Make sure you eat healthy foods, get exercise, and see your healthcare providers for any of your normal wellness checkups.

### 2. Create a Quiet Space

By creating a quiet space around you, you can allow your body to rest and your mind to settle. When you do this, you can become aware of things around you and in you in a new and different way. The quiet space can be a spot in your home, a chair in a room, or a bench in a park. Anywhere where you can take some time to develop a familiarity with quiet.

### 3. Pay Attention with Purpose and Curiosity

Concentrating on what you are doing in the moment can help to clear your mind and free it from distractions. For example, take a walk outside and try to notice sounds of all types. Or, try a mindful eating exercise and slowly, with quiet attention, explore a food item with all of the senses before eating it – as if seeing it for the very first time, noticing the smells, colors, textures, and any sensations of pleasure or displeasure.

### 4. Pause and Notice Your Breath

Your breath is not something you may normally notice. Taking the time to pay attention to the sensations and movement of the breath in the body can be calming and quieting.

### 5. Practice Gratitude

Thinking about what we are grateful for opens our eyes to the goodness around us and supports our overall sense of well-being. For example, we can take a few minutes to reflect on the good things that happened during the day, keep a list of people and things for which we are grateful and/or create a gratitude journal using words and pictures. By pausing and paying attention, we can appreciate things we might otherwise take for granted.