

# 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Frequently Asked Questions

*March 11, 2020*

### **What is 2019 Novel Coronavirus?**

The 2019 Novel Coronavirus, or “SARS-CoV-2”, is a new respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. The disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 has been named coronavirus disease 2019 (abbreviated “COVID-19”). The initial reports of the outbreak suggested a link to a large seafood and animal market in Wuhan City; however, there is now evidence of broader person to person transmission. Cases are being reported from other parts of China and other countries, including the U.S.

The first case in the United States was announced on January 21, 2020. The first case of person-to-person transmission in the U.S. was reported on January 30, 2020, in a close contact to a confirmed case. Community spread is being detected in a growing number of countries, including in parts of the United States. In the coming days to weeks, more confirmed cases and transmission are expected in the US, including probable cases in Mississippi.

### **What is a novel coronavirus?**

A novel coronavirus is a new strain in the coronavirus family that has not been previously identified. The virus causing COVID-19 is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold. These are different viruses, and patients with COVID-19 will be evaluated and cared for differently than patients with common coronavirus diagnosis.

### **What is the source of COVID-19?**

Public health officials and partners are working hard to identify the source of COVID-19. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some causing illness in people and others that circulate among animals, including camels, cats and bats. SARS, another coronavirus that emerged to infect people, came from cats, while MERS, another coronavirus that emerged to infect people, came from camels.

### **How does the virus spread?**

Most often, spread from person-to-person happens among close contacts (about 6 feet). Person-to-person transmission is thought to occur mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how flu and other respiratory

germs spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

It's currently unclear if 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.

Typically, with most respiratory viruses, people are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).

### **Can someone who has had COVID-19 spread the illness to others?**

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person. Someone who is actively sick with COVID-19 can spread the illness to others. That is why CDC recommends that these patients be isolated either in the hospital or at home (depending on how sick they are) until they are better and no longer pose a risk of infecting others.

### **What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

Current symptoms reported for patients with COVID-19 have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. It can mimic flu symptoms including fatigue. COVID-19 differs from the flu because it is connected with travel to a country with widespread community transmission, or close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 14 days.

### **How can I help protect myself?**

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- Get a flu vaccination every year.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

### **Have there been cases of COVID-19 in Mississippi?**

No, there are currently no confirmed cases in Mississippi.

Currently, the risk of infection in Mississippi is low, but the MSDH continues to actively monitor the situation. Transmission of the virus is currently dependent on exposure, through direct travel to an affected country experiencing widespread community transmission (i.e. China, Iran, Italy, Japan, or South Korea) within the past 14 days, or direct contact to someone with confirmed infection in the past 14 days.

### **Who is at the highest risk for severe illness?**

Older adults (65 years of age and older) and people who have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease are at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness. If you are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 because of your age or because you have a serious long-term health problem, it is extra important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of getting sick with the disease.

### **What is Mississippi doing specifically to prepare for the spread of this virus?**

MSDH is closely monitoring the rapidly evolving situation. With other state agencies, MSDH has activated emergency operations in order to prepare for possible person-to-person transmission of COVID-19 in Mississippi.

MSDH is increasing surveillance (monitoring) activities to identify cases of COVID-19 as quickly as possible and to limit person-to-person transmission.

The CDC continues to notify MSDH of travelers with possible exposure or travel to areas of concern. Upon notification from the CDC, MSDH initiates active monitoring of these travelers as indicated. Additionally, any monitored individual who begins to show symptoms will be evaluated at an appropriate healthcare facility.

MSDH is working diligently with healthcare providers throughout the state to monitor the situation and provide guidance and updated information as the situation changes.

Other steps that MSDH is taking include ensuring the capacity of the MSDH Public Health Laboratory for COVID-19 testing and informing all Mississippi healthcare providers about procedures for identifying and testing for COVID-19 cases.

MSDH is also providing guidance to business, education and other entities on how to respond to the possible spread of COVID-19 in the community.

### **Should I be tested for COVID-19?**

If you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, **within 14 days after travel from an affected country with widespread community transmission (i.e. China, Iran, Italy, Japan, or South Korea)**, you should call ahead to a healthcare professional and mention your recent travel.

If you develop a fever or symptoms of respiratory illness and have had **close contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patient**, you should call ahead to a healthcare professional and mention your exposure to a COVID-19 patient.

Your healthcare provider will be able to evaluate you and determine the best course of treatment and testing. MSDH is available to answer any healthcare provider questions about exposure risk and testing.

### **Is it safe to go on a cruise?**

CDC recommends travelers, particularly those with underlying health issues, postpone all cruise ship travel at this time. Cruise ship passengers are at an increased risk of person-to-person spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19. Older adults and travelers with underlying health issues should avoid situations that put them at increased risk for more severe disease, including avoiding crowded places, and avoiding non-essential travel.

### **Am I at risk for novel coronavirus from a package or products shipping from China?**

There is still a lot that is unknown about the newly emerged COVID-19 and how it spreads. In general, because these germs don't live long on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient temperatures.

Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread most often by respiratory droplets.

Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with imported goods and there have not been any cases of COVID-19 in the United States associated with imported goods.

### **What about animals or animal products imported from China?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not have any evidence to suggest that animals or animal products imported from China pose a risk for spreading COVID-19 in the United States. However, this is a rapidly evolving situation and information will be updated as it becomes available. Currently the strongest risk of transmission is respiratory droplets.

Where can I go for more information about COVID-19?

- Visit the MSDH website at <http://HealthyMS.com>
- Call the MSDH COVID-19 Hotline (8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday) at 1-877-978-6453.
- Download the free **MS Ready** app on your smartphone to receive public health information and alerts from MSDH.