

A recent outbreak of a new type of coronavirus (Novel Coronavirus) not previously found in humans has flooded the news over the last few days causing panic, fear and confusion among people of all age groups worldwide. Although the extent of the lethality of the virus has not yet been fully understood, scientists are working hard, and a lot of information will change rapidly based on their findings, which is the norm whenever there is an outbreak of a new virus.

1 What is 2019-nCoV?

2019-nCoV (Novel Coronavirus) is a type of virus belonging to the family of coronavirus which includes Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the common cold.

2 How does it compare to SARS and MERS?

Immediately after the news appeared on the internet, comparisons were drawn between 2019-nCoV and some of the other viral infections that claimed multiple lives over the past couple of decades. While the severity of 2019-nCoV was initially thought to be more than SARS and MERS, studies so far have suggested otherwise, which is a good sign. What we do know is that there have been multiple fatalities in China, and that other cases (not yet fatal) have been reported in other countries worldwide.

3 How easy is the spread?

The transmission of 2019-nCoV is similar to other viral infections like influenza. Coughing, sneezing and human contact (for example handshaking) will all transmit the virus. However, scientists are working hard to determine exactly how easily the virus is spread. One problem so far is that the virus can be spread before symptoms show themselves.

Based on the early data collected by The Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 32% of the total reported cases had direct contact with other infected people whereas 22% were exposed to the Wuhan meat market, where the virus is thought to have originated.

4 Is there a treatment available?

Since 2019-nCoV affects the respiratory system, it is important to ensure that patients receive appropriate symptomatic care as there is no treatment against the virus yet. There is no vaccination currently available for the virus. Scientists are working on this.

Those particularly at risk are the very young, the very old and anyone with a pre-existing respiratory illness or weakness.

5 Symptoms and precautions

The symptoms for 2019-nCoV are fever, cough and shortness of breath. Doctors advise the best precaution as hydration and good personal hygiene. Regular washing of hands is essential to prevent the spread of the virus, if soap and water is not readily available then anti-bac gels will also help. If you are in an affected area already, wear a face mask when you go out.

Most Governments are warning against all travel to China and in particular the city of Wuhan.

NOTE: Be careful if you travel as when a government issues such a warning it normally invalidates any insurance cover you may have. If in doubt check with your Insurer.

6 How the world has reacted to 2019-nCoV?

World Health Organization (W.H.O) has not yet declared this virus to be 'global emergency' and is more epidemic in nature. The virus that originated in Wuhan City, China, is being continually monitored by the Chinese Government and quarantine measures have been taken.

7 What should I do if I think I have the virus?

Try to remain calm. We get many viruses through our lives and our bodies will fight them hard!

Contact your medical professional – by phone would be the best option to avoid attending a clinic and further spreading the virus. Advise them of your symptoms, and if you have recently travelled then make sure they know that too. Keep hydrated and warm.

The information we have on this virus is constantly changing so for further information and updates on Novel Coronavirus, please visit World Health Organisation on www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019