



CORONAVIRUS BULLETIN

Significant disease outbreak update

FEBRUARY 25TH, 2020

General Update

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently changed the name for the virus that is causing the current outbreak to SARS-CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2). This is due to the genetic similarity of the current virus to the one that caused the 2002 SARS outbreak. In addition, they have changed the name of the disease that it causes to COVID-19.

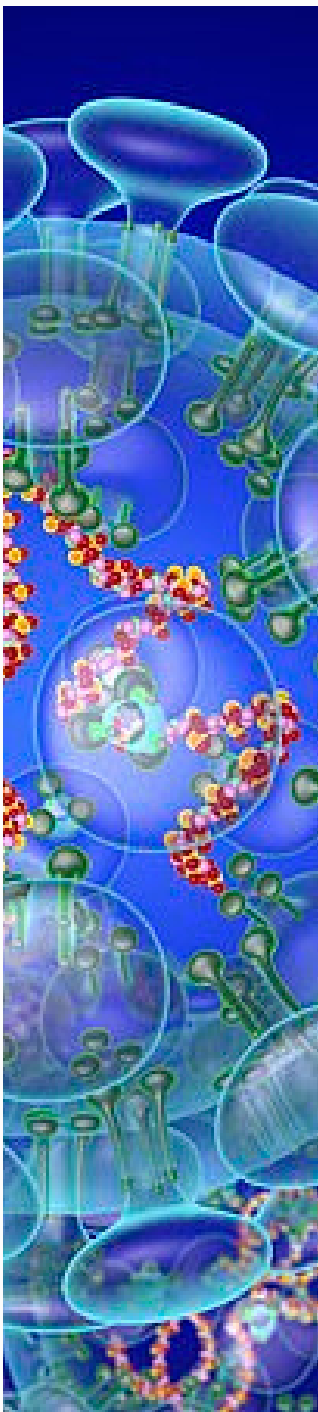
As with all bulletins, the data quoted below and the conclusions drawn are likely to change somewhat as the situation evolves.

Throughout the outbreak, it has been helpful to consider the situation in mainland China and the rest of the world separately. There are currently 79,339 total cases, with 77,262 within mainland China (97%). Of the mainland cases, almost all (83%) have been within Hubei province, where the outbreak was first recognised.

Since the start of the outbreak, there has been focus on the spread of the virus outside China (exported cases) as these cases are a measure of the likelihood of a global pandemic.

Throughout January, there was the hope that sustained person-to-person spread of the virus would not occur outside China and, for a while, it seemed that only very close contacts of travellers coming from Hubei were contracting COVID-19. Unfortunately, this situation has changed.

As of the time of writing, sustained person-to-person spread has been confirmed in several countries and is being monitored by the World Health Authority.



Global Spread

International Position

In the last two weeks, it has become clear that there is sustained, person-to-person spread of the virus outside China with 2,078 confirmed cases worldwide. The largest numbers have been recorded in South Korea (833) and on "Diamond Princess," a cruise ship docked in Japan (691). In addition, there has been a large increase in cases in Italy (230 cases, 5 deaths) and Iran (43 cases, 8 deaths).

The reasons that exported cases have given rise to sustained transmission are varied, and affected countries are taking stringent measures to try to slow or prevent spread. In South Korea, officials have designated the cities of Daegu and Cheogondo as "special care zones," with public facilities closed and mass gathering events suspended. Personnel, assistance, and equipment are being provided to aid in public health activities. In Seoul, several large public venues have been closed and gatherings at rallies have been banned.

In Italy, a dozen towns in the northern Lombardy region have been quarantined in an effort to slow the spread of the virus. Elsewhere, travel restrictions, contact tracing, and border screenings remain in place.

Interpretation

While the situations in South Korea and Italy are serious, the great concern of the WHO has always been for countries with less-developed health systems getting uncontrollable community spread. The degree to which the virus spreads in Iraq, Iran, and other Middle Eastern countries over the next couple weeks will be critical.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General who had said there was a "window of opportunity" to prevent a pandemic, described the window as "closing" last Friday. This was mainly in response to sustained international spread. In addition, despite a fall in new cases seen in Hubei, the Chinese government has said that "the situation in Hubei remains severe and complex."

The WHO maintain their position on the severity of COVID-19 and the mortality rate, although they stress that this may change as better data becomes available. Currently, it is thought that approximately 20% of those infected have what is known as "severe disease," which possesses a 1-2% mortality rate. It should be stressed that most people have "mild disease," which gets better on its own.

Advice to those in affected areas

What steps can be taken to try and avoid infection?

There are a variety of simple steps that can help reduce the risk of becoming infected, even in an area where there is an extensive outbreak.

1) Avoid large crowds and public gatherings

Being in close proximity to a large number of people, even if they (or you) are wearing a mask, increases the probability that you will contract the virus. Many countries have cancelled large public gatherings in affected areas.

2) Wearing a mask

It is unlikely that wearing a mask significantly reduces your risk of infection, except in a healthcare setting. In many countries, however, it is socially acceptable to wear masks in public spaces and you may be criticised if you do not do so.

3) Regular hand washing

One of the most effective ways of reducing spread is through regular and thorough hand washing and avoidance of hand to mouth contact. Use of alco-gel throughout the day can also significantly reduce the risk.

4) Catch your coughs

Corona-viruses tend to be spread through coughing. 'Catching' your cough in the crook of your elbow or a tissue can help prevent the virus infecting others or getting onto surfaces around an office or home.

5) Social distancing

Substituting face to face meetings with teleconferencing, avoiding shaking hands and distancing from those with flu like symptoms can all help reduce transmission. Staff working in contact centres in endemic areas should avoid sharing headsets or visiting each others work areas.

Key Facts

Simple measures are the most effective in controlling spread.

Hand washing has been shown to be effective and the WHO and CDC have published posters that demonstrate the proper technique.

Masks have traditionally been worn in China during outbreaks. Except in specific circumstances, masks are not very effective at preventing spread.

If worn, masks must be changed frequently. In healthcare settings, the patient will be asked to wear a mask.

Governments (sometimes in collaboration with the WHO) ultimately set the policy on the movement of infected patients, including those being carried by air ambulance.

Frequently asked questions*

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell. Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems such as high blood pressure, heart problems, or diabetes are more likely to develop serious illness. About 2% of people with the disease have died. People with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

How does COVID-19 spread?

People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease can spread from person-to-person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, which are spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs or exhales. These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. People can also catch COVID-19 if they breathe in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs out or exhales droplets. This is why it is important to stay more than 1 meter (3 feet) away from a person who is sick.

Should I worry about COVID-19?

If you are not in an area where COVID-19 is spreading, have not travelled from one of those areas, or have not been in close contact with someone who has and is feeling unwell, your chances of contracting COVID-19 are currently low. However, it's understandable that you may feel stressed and anxious about the situation. It's a good idea to get the facts to help you accurately determine your risks so that you can take reasonable precautions. Your healthcare provider, national public health authority, and employer are all potential sources of accurate information on COVID-19 and whether it is in your area. It is important to be informed of the situation where you live and take appropriate measures to protect yourself.

Frequently asked questions*

Should I wear a mask to protect myself?

People with no respiratory symptoms, such as coughing, do not need to wear a medical mask. WHO recommends the use of masks for people who have symptoms of COVID-19 and for those caring for individuals who have symptoms, including cough and fever. The use of masks is crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone (at home or in a health care facility).

WHO advises rational use of medical masks to avoid unnecessary wastage of precious resources and mis-use of masks. Use a mask only if you have respiratory symptoms (coughing or sneezing), have suspected COVID-19 infection with mild symptoms, or are caring for someone with suspected COVID-19 infection. A suspected COVID-19 infection is linked to travel in areas where cases have been reported or being in close contact with someone who has travelled in these areas and has become ill.

How long is the incubation period of COVID-19?

The “incubation period” means the time between catching the virus and beginning to have symptoms of the disease. Most estimates of the incubation period for COVID-19 range from 1-14 days, most commonly around five days. These estimates will be updated as more data becomes available.

Is there a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19?

To date, there is no vaccine and no specific antiviral medicine to prevent or treat COVID-19. However, those affected should receive care to relieve symptoms. People with serious illness should be hospitalized. Most patients recover thanks to supportive care.

Possible vaccines and some specific drug treatments are under investigation. They are being tested through clinical trials. WHO is coordinating efforts to develop vaccines and medicines to prevent and treat COVID-19.

The most effective ways to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 are to frequently clean your hands, cover your cough with the bend of elbow or tissue, and maintain a distance of at least 1 meter (3 feet) from people who are coughing or sneezing

*From the WHO FAQ list:<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses> accessed on 24th February 14:00 GMT.

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