

Coronavirus Update

From the US Embassy Med Unit:

Enclosed in this email is information and answers to common questions related to the new **Coronavirus respiratory infection** that has developed in Wuhan, China. This information is taken from the CDC site and from information provided by MED's Infectious Disease Physician.

Q: What is a novel coronavirus?

A: A novel coronavirus (CoV) is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified.

Q: What is the source of 2019 Novel Coronavirus?

A: Public health officials and partners are working hard to identify the source of the 2019-nCoV. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some causing illness in people and others that circulate among animals, including camels, cats and bats. Early on, many of the patients in the outbreak in Wuhan, China reportedly had some link to a large seafood and animal market, suggesting the virus likely emerged from an animal source. Analysis of the genetic tree of this virus is ongoing to know the specific source of the virus. SARS, another coronavirus that emerged to infect people, came from civit cats, while MERS, another coronavirus that emerged to infect people, came from camels.

Q: What are the symptoms and complications that Novel Coronavirus 2019 can cause?

A: Current symptoms reported for patients with 2019-nCoV have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever¹, cough, and difficulty breathing.

Q: How does the virus spread?

A: This virus probably originally emerged from an animal source but now seems to be spreading from person-to-person. It's important to note that person-to-person spread can happen on a continuum. Some viruses are highly contagious (like measles), while other viruses are less so. **It's not clear yet how easily 2019-nCoV spreads from person-to-person.** When person-to-person spread has occurred with MERS and SARS, it is thought to have happened mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. Spread of MERS and SARS between people has generally occurred between close contacts

Q: How concerned should we be about these infections?

A: Discovery of a new infectious agent that has been associated with even a few deaths is scary and is rightly a cause for concern, but we need to consider a few things:

- We know of the ~2900 people who have been symptomatic and infected and 82 deaths, but we also know that **some cases had very few symptoms**. It is likely that many more people have been infected that have never come to medical attention. Only after widespread testing for coronavirus can be done in the Wuhan population will we really know the “denominator” to determine a case fatality rate (which is likely to be significantly lower than the 3% of the identified cases so far).
- **It appears that very few children have been ill with Wuhan coronavirus and those that have been have had a milder illness.**
- **Most of the deaths have occurred in people over age 60 and with multiple medical problems.**
- The majority of the cases have a Wuhan connection. Only time will tell if this transmission pattern changes but this is part of why the CDC continues to state that Wuhan coronavirus is of low risk to the American public at large and the WHO has not declared this a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).

Q: Should we be limiting contact with staff or family members who are returning from China? Is it okay to have them in offices, classrooms, training, etc?

A: At this point **neither the WHO nor the CDC have recommended any preclusions for people coming from China**. Currently, the CDC in the United States is screening all arrivals from China and doing more in-depth screening of arrivals who have been specifically in Wuhan. From what has been seen to date there is no indication that travelers from China should be limited in their interactions at work, school, or recreational activities. ***Excluding someone “out of an abundance of caution” is not indicated, unfairly stigmatizes people without evidence that it protects anyone and should NOT be done.***

Q: Our consular staff and guard staff are concerned that they are most likely to be exposed to Wuhan coronavirus and want screening performed. Should we be checking for fever and screening for respiratory symptoms? Should we be wearing masks? Cleaning surfaces?

A: **Fever checks and symptom screening are currently not recommendations of the WHO nor the CDC for people in a work or school setting who came from China**. That said there are a few things that should always be followed during respiratory illness season:

- If staff/guards see someone who appears visibly ill they should be politely asked to return on a day when they are feeling better.
- Routine cleaning of surfaces is recommended. Most household disinfectants to include diluted bleach will kill the coronavirus

Q. What is the role of a surgical mask in preventing spread of the illness?

A: The reality is that **surgical masks have a modest ability to prevent an infected person from spreading respiratory infections to others, but do not effectively prevent an uninfected person from becoming infected.**

- The take home message here is you want to get masks on sick people, especially if they are coughing and sneezing to minimize risks to others. Putting a surgical mask on healthy people really does not change their risk.
- What the Chinese have achieved with universal surgical mask wearing is that those who are infected are diminishing their risk of infecting others.
- Coronaviruses are generally spread like influenza, by droplets, i.e. you cough and small droplets are aerosolized and inhaled by someone else. Fortunately, these only seem to be effectively spread up to about 2 meters from the source patient so maintaining distance or interviewing someone at an entrance really minimizes the chance of exposure.

The following are websites at the WHO and CDC, which will have up to date information on this rapidly changing situation.

<https://www.who.int/ith/2020-24-01-outbreak-of-Pneumonia-caused-by-new-coronavirus/en/>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/index.html>