



Frequently Asked Questions about the Coronavirus

Updated March 25, 2020

New virus outbreaks like the 2019 Novel Coronavirus are always unsettling. To help better inform and address the concerns of our constituents, Rep. Porter and her staff compiled this FAQ to help Orange County residents understand this important public health issue.

The Basics

What is a coronavirus?

The 2019 Novel Coronavirus (SARS- Cov-2 or COVID-19) is a virus identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, China. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), common coronaviruses usually cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory tract illnesses, like the common cold. Most people will get infected with a coronavirus at some point in their lives, and the infection is often very brief.¹

In more severe cases, coronaviruses can cause lower-respiratory tract illnesses, like pneumonia or bronchitis. This is more common in people with cardiopulmonary disease, those with weakened immune systems, infants, and older adults.² Recent research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), found that the median age of patients is between 49 and 56 years, and cases in children have been rare.³

In the past, there have been two other major outbreaks of coronaviruses with severe symptoms: MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV. MERS cases continue to occur, primarily in the Arabian Peninsula, but no human cases of SARS have been reported anywhere in the world since 2004.⁴

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/about/symptoms.html>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/about/symptoms.html>

³ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2760782>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/about/symptoms.html>

The full data sequence of COVID-19 has now been published. According to experts, such as, Karla Satchell, a microbiologist and immunologist at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, the “new virus’s proteins are between 70 and 99 percent identical to their counterparts in the SARS virus.”⁵ Even small changes in DNA sequencing can cause a virus to operate differently, and scientists are currently exploring the differences between COVID-19 and previous coronaviruses.

Additionally, CDC experts noted that it is possible, if not likely, that the virus will mutate at some point. This means the DNA sequencing will change slightly. This is normal and should not cause immediate alarm. These experts will notify the public if changes in the virus are detected that make it more dangerous.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to those of the seasonal flu, including fever, chills, and a dry cough.⁶ Individuals who experience these symptoms should visit their healthcare provider. The CDC recommends contacting your healthcare provider if you are concerned you may have COVID-19 before your visit so they can appropriately prepare.

In a call with media and Congressional staff, the CDC explained that the two primary risk factors identified so far are travel to the Hubei Province, where Wuhan is located, or close contact with someone who has recently returned from the Hubei Province.

Where and how did COVID-19 originate?

According to the CDC, COVID-19 originated in Wuhan, China. It likely came from an animal source but now appears to be spreading by person-to-person contact.⁷

What is the impact of COVID-19 thus far?

There are 4,226 confirmed cases of the virus in the United States to date (March 18, 2020).⁸ The CDC expects to identify more cases in the United States in the coming weeks even as precautions increase. They will regularly update their [website](#) on suspected, negative, and positive cases.

The impact has been more concentrated in China, specifically in Hubei Province. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared coronavirus a global health emergency, and on March 11, 2020 the WHO declared the spread of the virus a

⁵ <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/how-new-wuhan-coronavirus-stacks-up-against-sars-mers>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>

“pandemic.”⁹ According to WHO, the number of confirmed cases increased to 372,757 worldwide on March 24, 2020. 291,010 of the infections were found outside of mainland China.¹⁰ To date (March 24, 2020) Italy has 63,927 confirmed cases, the United States has 54,453 (49 cases are among individuals repatriated to the U.S. from Asia), Spain has 33,089, France has 19,615, Korea has 9,037, the United Kingdom has 6,654, Germany has 6,012, Belgium has 3,743, Sweden has 2,016, Australia has 1,709, Malaysia has 1,518, Canada has 1,432, Japan has 1,128, Thailand has 827, Finland has 700, Singapore has 507, the Philippines has 462, Russia has 438, India has 434, the United Arab Emirates has 198, Vietnam has 123, Sri Lanka has 97, Cambodia has 87, and Nepal has 2.¹¹ 737 Americans have died from the disease. In California, there have been 2,102 confirmed cases of the virus and 40 deaths (March 24, 2020)¹².

On February 26, Orange County officials declared a local health emergency, but they urged residents “not to become alarmed as there is no current local outbreak.”¹³ “This is a rapidly evolving situation,” County Health Officer Nichole Quick said, adding that the emergency declaration will allow the county to be “more nimble and flexible” in responding.¹⁴ Rep. Porter made a public statement about the declaration, explaining further: “This declaration is a call to preparation, not panic. Coronavirus is a serious and growing threat, and the only way we’ll manage this public health emergency is with collaboration grounded in science. As a partner at the federal level, I’ll continue seeking information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and communicating with our community about what is happening. Keeping Orange County families safe is my number one priority.” Since these announcements, Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency for the entire State of California.

On March 17, 2020 County Health Officer Dr. Nichole Quick issued a Health Officer’s Order today to protect the health and wellbeing of Orange County, CA residents.¹⁵ This issue prohibits “all public and private gatherings of any number of people, including at places of work, occurring outside a single household or living space,” but is not the

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-51318246>

¹⁰ https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200324-sitrep-64-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=703b2c40_2

¹¹ https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200324-sitrep-64-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=703b2c40_2

¹² <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OPA/Pages/NR20-32.aspx>

¹³ <https://www.ocregister.com/2020/02/26/orange-county-leaders-to-declare-local-health-emergency-in-response-to-coronavirus/>

¹⁴ <https://www.ocregister.com/2020/02/26/orange-county-leaders-to-declare-local-health-emergency-in-response-to-coronavirus/>

¹⁵ <https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2020/03/17/oc-health-officials-set-to-close-dine-in-restaurants/>

same as a shelter in place order.¹⁶ The order helps to increase social distancing without complete restrictions on individual movement. The order is in place until March 31.

Addressing COVID-19

How is the virus transmitted?

According to the CDC, it is currently unclear how easily novel coronavirus is spreading between people. As more data about the virus becomes available, the CDC will update individuals on methods to spread the virus and will change its policies appropriately to prevent transmission.¹⁷

On February 26, 2020, the CDC confirmed the first instance of a patient infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 in California in a person who reportedly did not have relevant travel history or exposure to another known patient with COVID-19.¹⁸

According to the CDC, the patient's exposure is unknown at this time. It is possible this case could be the first United States case of community spread of COVID-19. Community spread means "spread of an illness for which the source of infection is unknown."¹⁹ It is also still possible that the patient may have been exposed to a returned traveler who was infected and officials are not yet aware of the contact.²⁰

How can I protect myself from the virus?

The CDC recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- 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.²¹

¹⁶ <https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2020/03/17/oc-health-officials-set-to-close-dine-in-restaurants/>

¹⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

¹⁸ Capitol Hill Announcement sent by the CDC on February 26, 2020 at 8:26 PM

¹⁹ Capitol Hill Announcement sent by the CDC on February 26, 2020 at 8:26 PM

²⁰ Capitol Hill Announcement sent by the CDC on February 26, 2020 at 8:26 PM

²¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention-treatment.html>

The CDC has also noted that it is currently flu and respiratory disease season. Subsequently, they recommend getting a flu vaccine and taking flu antivirals if prescribed by your physician.²²

In a briefing by the CDC, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, and other federal agencies on January 29, 2020 federal officials also encouraged Americans to limit all non-essential travel to China. On January 30, 2020, the State Department issued a Level 4: Travel Advisory for China. In the statement, the State Department wrote: “Do not travel to China due to the novel coronavirus first identified in Wuhan, China... Travelers should be prepared for travel restrictions to be put into effect with little or no advance notice.”²³ Travel advisories have now also been issued for parts of Europe.²⁴

While many have purchased surgical masks, these are not a proven method of protection.²⁵

What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

If you think you may have COVID-19, call your primary care provider or urgent care to let them know that you would like to make an appointment because you believe you may have COVID-19. This will allow your provider to prepare for your visit and take any necessary precautions to keep you, the providers in the clinic, and other patients safe. Further, if they are unable to accommodate these needs, they may be able to direct you to the appropriate healthcare professionals.

Is there a vaccine?

Currently, there is not a 2019 Novel Coronavirus vaccine; however, the CDC is in the process of a phase 1 study of a vaccination. A vaccination was not needed or developed for the previous SARS outbreak, as the federal government’s public health approach was sufficient to stop the spread of the virus.

Vaccine development takes time. While Massachusetts-based biotech firm Moderna and California-based company Inovio Pharmaceuticals have developed early-stage, experimental vaccines,²⁶ the testing and approval process is extensive. One expert explains: “When we talk about vaccine development programs, a typical vaccine development program from discovery to licensure can cost up to a billion dollars and take up to a decade. Obviously in an outbreak like this, the timeline is compressed

²² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>

²³ <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/china-travel-advisory.html>

²⁴ <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/novel-coronavirus-hubei-province--china.html>

²⁵ <https://www.prevention.com/health/a30677242/can-face-mask-prevent-coronavirus/>

²⁶ <https://www.foxbusiness.com/lifestyle/coronavirus-vaccine-pandemic-moderna-greffex-cost>

because of an urgent public health need."²⁷ The World Health Organization said this week it may be 18 months before a vaccine for COVID-19 is publicly available.²⁸

Is there a treatment?

The CDC and health professionals are currently testing various therapeutic therapies for the 2019 Novel Coronavirus. In China, a human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) drug is being tested and used as a possible treatment for the virus, though it remains unknown whether the drugs are effective.²⁹ The drug, developed by AbbVie and known as Aluvia, is “thought to be a potential treatment for the coronavirus due to its ability to block a protease that the virus needs to replicate within the human body.”³⁰ Johnson & Johnson has also shipped some of its HIV treatment drug, Prezcoibix, to China for possible testing.³¹

What is the federal government doing to stop COVID-19?

The CDC, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, and other relevant federal agencies have implemented proven public health approaches to stop the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus. This involves early diagnosis, isolation, and contact tracing. Each day, these agencies continue their hard work to identify additional preventative and treatment options for the 2019 Novel Coronavirus. The CDC is conducting tests on all individuals potentially affected to quickly diagnose the disease and prevent human-to-human spread.

At this time, the CDC has set up protocol at airports and entry points for those traveling from China and Europe to the United States. These screenings can help support early detection of the virus to prevent travelers from carrying the virus into the United States. Customs and Border Protection is working closely with medical professionals to protect personnel in airports and detect the virus in passengers.

The CDC began distributing diagnostic tests to local agencies on February 4, 2020, and the process should be up and running soon across the country. Testing at the CDC adds 5-6 days to the process, which some have said can prolong quarantine and complicate treatment. There are still serious concerns about the availability of tests and the number of tests available. On March 12, 2020, Rep. Porter sent a letter to HHS and the

²⁷ <https://www.foxbusiness.com/lifestyle/coronavirus-vaccine-pandemic-moderna-greffex-cost>

²⁸ <https://www.sciencealert.com/who-says-a-coronavirus-vaccine-is-18-months-away>

²⁹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-drugmakers-ship-therapies-to-china-seeking-to-treat-coronavirus-11580166592>

³⁰ <https://www.biospace.com/article/abbvie-to-donate-hiv-drug-to-china-as-potential-treatment-for-coronavirus/>

³¹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-drugmakers-ship-therapies-to-china-seeking-to-treat-coronavirus-11580166592>

FDA requesting additional guidance from the agencies regarding labs' ability to conduct tests and streamlining of approval processes for new testing.

On March 4, 2020, the House of Representatives passed a supplemental funding package to address the coronavirus, which the Senate also passed the next day.³² The supplemental funding package included:

- More than \$3 billion for research and development of vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics;
- \$2.2 billion in public health funding for prevention, preparedness, and response, \$950 million of which is to support state & local health agencies;
- Nearly \$1 billion for procurement of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, to support healthcare preparedness and Community Health Centers, and to improve medical surge capacity;
- \$61 million to facilitate the development and review of medical countermeasures, devices, therapies, and vaccines, and to help mitigate potential supply chain interruptions;
- \$1.25 billion to address the coronavirus abroad to help keep Americans safe here at home; and
- Allows for an estimated \$7 billion in low-interest loans to affected small businesses, to help cushion the economic blow of this public health emergency.

On March 12, 2020, the House passed additional supplemental funding, as well as guidance related to nutrition, childcare, workforce, and small business programs. The Senate has not yet passed this legislation. On Wednesday, February 26, President Trump announced that Vice President Pence would oversee the Administration's response to COVID-19.³³

Supporting Americans in China

Has anyone been evacuated?

On January 29, a plane of 195 United States citizens, including both Foreign Service Officers and American citizens, and six crew members, landed in Riverside, California.

³² <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/04/house-coronavirus-funding-121065>

³³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/02/26/congress-coronavirus-response/>

These Americans were evacuated from Wuhan, and are subject to protocols to assess their health or risk of the COVID-19.

Since January 29, the State Department has evacuated around 850 people, most of them Americans, on five charter flights out of Wuhan. Two additional flights were evacuated to Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California and at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego, California on February 5.³⁴

Additional plans for evacuations will be determined as the CDC, Department of State, and other relevant federal agencies continue to evaluate the situation and determine the best approach.

Where are the evacuees now?

The evacuees are now at three different military bases in California.³⁵ Those who were evacuated are subject to a quarantine for 14 days. Christopher R. Braden, a deputy director of the Centers for Disease Control, and other state and federal health officials conducted a live video briefing on January 29, 2020 to discuss the situation and address concerns.³⁶ You can watch the full briefing [here](#).

How are we keeping communities safe?

According to state and federal health officials, the individuals on the plane want to be helpful in protecting the health of themselves, their families, and their communities. Many undergoing diagnostic testing are currently self-quarantining in their homes.

The virus has shown a possible incubation period of up to 14 days. Subsequently, evacuees and all traveling from mainland China are being monitored or quarantined for 14 days.

These decisions have been informed by successful past methods used to address coronaviruses.

All repatriated citizens and those with travel history to China, South Korea, and Italy are being closely monitored and officials are taking necessary precautions to keep communities safe.

What is the California State response to COVID-19?

Statewide Government

Governor Newsom declared a State of Emergency to make additional resources available, formalize emergency actions already underway across multiple state

³⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/05/us/coronavirus-flights-wuhan.html>

³⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/29/world/asia/coronavirus-china.html>

³⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/countyriversidedepartmentofpublichealth/videos/467762244134613/>

agencies and departments, and help the state prepare for broader spread of COVID-19. Governor Gavin Newsom requested the Legislature make up to \$20 million available for the state government to respond to the spread of COVID-19. More information can be found [here](#).

Emergency Planning

California made available some of its emergency planning reserves of 21 million N95 filtering facepiece masks for use in certain health care settings to ease shortages of personal protective equipment. California activated the State Operations Center to its highest level to coordinate response efforts across the state.

Public Health Department

In coordination with the CDC, state and local health departments, we are actively responding to cases of COVID-19. They are also coordinating with federal authorities and local health departments that have implemented screening, monitoring and, in some cases quarantine of returning travelers.

The Public Health Department is supporting hospitals and local public health laboratories in the collection of specimens and testing for COVID-19. They are providing information, guidance documents, and technical support to local health departments, health care facilities, providers, schools, universities, colleges, and childcare facilities across California Click [here](#) for more information from the CA Department of Public Health.

Businesses

The California Employee Development Department (EDD) is encouraging individuals who are unable to work due to exposure to COVID-19 to file a Disability Insurance claim. EDD is also encouraging employers who are experiencing a slowdown in their businesses or services as a result of the Coronavirus impact on the economy to apply for an Unemployment Insurance work sharing program.

[Click here](#) for more information about statewide guidance, and [here](#) for additional business information.

Social Distancing

The State of California has issued guidance for large institutions and gatherings and recommends that all persons not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms practice social distancing. This will slow the spread of the disease by practicing what is known as social distancing. More information can be found [here](#).

Resources for Seniors

The State of California has issued [guidance](#) to protect seniors, who are particularly at risk. These recommendations include resources and suggestions for seniors who are

high risk regarding social distancing, limited movement, outdoor activities, and community supports.