

What you need to know about 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

What is a coronavirus?

COVID-19 isn't the only coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are associated with respiratory illness. These viruses typically spread through coughing or sneezing, much like influenza (flu).

Coronaviruses are common across the world, particularly in fall and winter, and usually result in mild symptoms associated with the common cold. Most people are infected with one or more of these viruses at some point in their lives.

COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus. A coronavirus is called "novel" when it hasn't been seen before in human populations. In the past, novel coronaviruses like Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) have caused more severe symptoms than common coronaviruses and have caused outbreaks internationally. However, being novel does not mean that a virus is going to have more severe symptoms. COVID-19 is still being investigated in order to fully understand its severity.

How likely am I to catch COVID-19?

Currently, the American public is at very low risk of catching COVID-19. While close monitoring of the situation continues, the seasonal flu is a much bigger concern for people in the United States. So far, all U.S. cases of COVID-19 have recently been to China or have lived with a family member who had COVID-19. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection](#) have enacted screening stations at multiple U.S. airports in an abundance of caution.

What are the symptoms COVID-19?

Symptoms of coronavirus infection include fever, cough and shortness of breath. Symptoms appear within two to 14 days after exposure. People who have coronavirus symptoms **and** have traveled to China in the past 14 days or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 should first call a health care provider, urgent care or hospital for instructions before going to a clinic or emergency room in person.

How serious is COVID-19?

Public health officials are still learning about how COVID-19 affects people, but we know that the majority will experience mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. Older people and those with preexisting health conditions seem to be more at risk for symptoms that might progress to moderate or severe illness and in some cases death.

Is COVID-19 widespread in the United States?

No. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) is closely monitoring COVID-19, and [tallying cases of the disease in the United States](#). COVID-19 remains extremely rare in the United States. It is considered a risk for those who have recently traveled to China or the close contacts of people diagnosed with COVID-19. Seasonal influenza is a much greater risk in the United States.

Is there a plan to address COVID-19 should it spread in America?

Yes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is working with the [Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment](#) and [El Paso County Public Health](#) to implement a well-coordinated response system that is designed to protect the American public.

On a global scale, the [World Health Organization](#) is “working closely with global experts, governments and partners to rapidly expand scientific knowledge on this new virus, to track the spread and virulence of the virus, and to provide advice to countries and individuals on measures to protect health and prevent the spread of this outbreak.”

What if I’m traveling?

[The CDC recommends that travelers avoid](#) all nonessential travel to the People’s Republic of China (this does not include the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, or the island of Taiwan). Anyone flying out of China into the United States [will now be routed to specific U.S. airports with enhanced health screenings](#). No Colorado airport is currently receiving flights from China or offering these enhanced health screenings.

How do I keep myself and others safe?

The best advice is also the simplest: Wash your hands frequently or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer; cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze; avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu symptoms and stay home if you’re sick. If you haven’t already, get a flu shot. COVID-19 is very low risk in our state, but a typical flu season in Colorado will see thousands of hospitalized cases.

Where can I get the most up to date information about COVID-19?

To stay up to date on COVID-19 developments, check the following resources:

- [El Paso County Public Health](#)
- [Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)

For answers in many languages including English, Spanish (Español), Mandarin (普通话), and more:

- Call **CO HELP** at **303-389-1687** or **1-877-462-2911**
- Email COHELP@RMPDC.org