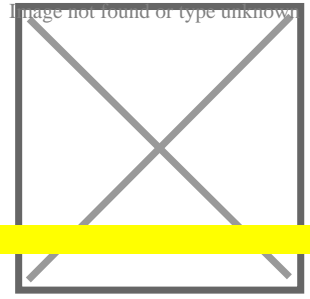


Unit 22 — Coronavirus COVID-19

Reading: Ten Questions About the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Answered



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Note: This article was written on March 5th, 2020 and may not reflect current events or updates. Please refer to the World Health Organisation (WHO) website or a local governmental source for more updated and/or accurate information. As a reminder, this website is for language learning purposes only and is not intended as medical advice.

#1. Why does the virus have two names?

"Coronavirus" refers to a large family of viruses causing respiratory infections, responsible for a variety of illnesses, including the common cold, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). What is currently being referred to as the coronavirus disease was first identified in December 2019 and has been since renamed Covid-19. The media and the public have continued to refer to it as simply "the coronavirus" but many have already switched to using the more precise term.

#2. What are the symptoms of the virus?

People who are infected with the Covid-19 virus often have flulike symptoms, such as fever, coughing, sore throat and difficulty breathing. However, not everyone who has a cold need be concerned about being infected with the coronavirus. To qualify for potential infection with the coronavirus, a person should have been in an area where the virus is active, or should have been in contact with someone who has visited an infected area. Areas with a high risk of infection are, for example, China, where the virus first manifested in the city of Wuhan. South Korea and Italy are currently other highly affected areas. Many experts now predict that the virus will spread rapidly worldwide.

#3. What should you do if you suspect that you might have the virus?

If you have flulike symptoms and have been to an infected area or have been in contact with an infected person, you should telephone your general practitioner, who will arrange for you to be tested for the virus. You should get the results of the test within 24 hours.

#4. How is the virus transmitted?

The coronavirus is transmitted from person to person, through close personal contact such as shaking hands. People who exhibit symptoms especially can spread the Covid-19 virus, because it is transmitted through the air by coughing and sneezing. The virus can also be spread by touching a surface with the virus on it and then touching one's mouth, nose or eyes. This is why frequent hand-washing is so important. To date there is no convincing evidence that, for example, pets play a role in the spread of the disease.

#5. Can you transmit the virus if you are not ill?

The majority of people who are infected by the coronavirus display the symptoms and therefore transmit the disease when they are ill. These symptoms don't have to be severe; according to the World Health Organization, most people who are infected with the virus have mild symptoms. You could therefore get the virus from someone who merely

coughs and does not feel very ill. There have been exceptional cases where an infected person has exhibited no symptoms. As yet there is no proof that the virus can survive for very long outside the body. You could, for example, still confidently open parcels from China.

If someone has been infected, the person does not immediately notice the symptoms of the Covid-19 virus. The symptoms only manifest themselves after a few days. On average, the incubation period is five to seven days. This incubation period has been calculated on the basis of data from many patients, who all experienced an incubation period of between two and twelve days. A maximum incubation period of two weeks is therefore assumed.

#6. Can you get the virus again if you have already been infected once?

A person who has been infected with the coronavirus can usually not be infected again, because the virus will then be recognized by the person's immune system.

#7. How dangerous is the virus?

The mortality rate among people who have been infected with the coronavirus is approximately 2%. However mortality is closely related to age and medical condition. Those patients who have died as a result of the Covid-19 virus are almost always older people whose immune system has been compromised by other medical conditions. By far the majority of patients recover fully from the Covid-19 virus. Of all infected persons, approximately 17% have serious complaints. It is also possible that more people could have been infected and subsequently have recovered from the virus without having consulted a doctor. This would mean that the number of persons who have been infected is actually higher than reported, but that the real mortality rate is slightly lower.

#8. Is there a cure for the coronavirus?

At the moment there is no cure for the virus and treatment is supportive. All doctors can do at the moment is to treat the symptoms of those with serious complaints, such as treating fever and providing extra oxygen to patients with airway complaints.

#9. Is there a vaccine?

There is still no vaccine against the Covid-19 virus. Various organizations, including the World Health Organization, are conducting extensive research into vaccines and other methods to prevent the further spread of the virus.

#10. Does wearing a facial mask help against contracting the virus?

Unfortunately people can still contract an illness such as coronavirus even if they wear a facial mask. Masks can however prevent people who are infected from spreading the virus. More important is to wash your hands regularly and thoroughly with soap, for at least 20 seconds, also including your wrists.

Discussion Questions

This article was written at an early stage of the outbreak. What information, if any, has been left out? Is any information incorrect or outdated?

Think of three additional questions about the Coronavirus and write them down. Now research the answers and write them down.