



This summary has been compiled by the University of Utah's Rocky Mountain Center for Occupational and Environmental Health using multiple sources and expert opinion. It will be updated as the epidemic progresses/recedes and information becomes better known.

What is the Corona virus?

Corona virus (aka, 2019 Novel Coronavirus, Wuhan China) is a new strain of an existing virus. Because it is new, much less is currently known about it. Corona virus outbreaks have previously occurred, such as "SARS" in 2003-04 and "MERS" in 2013-15. When a virus mutates or changes, studies need to be performed to measure the new strain's virulence, or its ability to infect humans. Based on prior research and experiences with past corona virus infections, the origin of this epidemic will likely be proven to be bats in China. This new corona virus is now found in humans both around the world (1) and in the USA (2).

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary, but are typical of respiratory infections, such as fever and cough (3). More severe cases can involve more serious symptoms such as shortness of breath. As the symptoms are typical of respiratory tract infections, they can be difficult to distinguish from other infections.

How contagious is it?

Contagiousness is not currently known, but appears significant. The degree of contagiousness will only become known with time, because investigations have to be completed to quantify things like how many people become infected when they are close to someone with the infection; how many asymptomatic cases occur; how many clinical infections occur; how many fatalities occur, etc.

How serious is it?

Cases range from mild to severe. The fatality rate is not yet known, but has been estimated at 3%. The fatality rate for typical annual influenza (aka, "flu cases") is much lower, but prior outbreaks of corona virus infections have had considerably higher fatality rates including SARS and MERS. Fatality rate is not the only consideration regarding seriousness, as a high rate of infectivity and/or easy transmissibility could result in more total fatalities despite a lower case fatality rate.

What is its incubation?

The incubation is the amount of time it takes between exposure and onset of symptoms. This is not currently known, but based on prior corona virus outbreaks, it is thought to be 2 to 7 days with rare cases of up to 14 days (4).

1 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/locations-confirmed-cases.html>

3 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/symptoms.html>

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

4 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/symptoms.html>

What to do with employees returning from China or another area known to have infections?

Currently, the safest course is to have the worker work from home for a minimum of 2 weeks and be without direct contact with other workers.

Should that worker become ill, they should promptly call their healthcare provider before appearing in their clinic or hospital (e.g., to arrange which entrance to use, to be given an appropriate type of mask before entering the building, etc.).

The person should also avoid all contact with other people, and if essential, use an “N95 Respirator” (see image to the right) when going out of the home.

How is Coronavirus treated?

There is no known effective treatment for the virus (5). There also is no current vaccine. If someone develops more severe symptoms, the complications such as respiratory failure may be treated by mechanical ventilation.

What if an employee has been in contact with someone exposed?

Use the same advice above as if the person was returning from China

What if someone has been in contact with someone thought to be infected?

Handle this person as if s/he was infected for a minimum period of 2 weeks.



What if this grows into an epidemic in the US? How to keep business going? What can an employer do to reduce risk of infection? Are there preparations to do now?

- Eliminate all close contact with anyone with infectious symptoms (6)
- Stop non-essential travel to China or other cities/countries with a potential epidemic in progress
- Consider having workers work from home who could be in the incubation stage due to potential exposure(s) (i.e., for 2 weeks after a possible exposure, particularly including into areas with an epidemic in progress)
- Clean commonly touched worksite surfaces frequently (e.g., hourly). These include door handles, bathroom doors, faucet handles, lunch tabletops, etc.
- Consider propping open doors to reduce handling. Clean surfaces with an agent that kills viruses.
- Encourage frequent handwashing.
- Teach workers to not touch their eyes, nose, and/or mouth with unwashed hands
- Teach workers to use tissues to catch a cough or sneeze, then throw that tissue away and wash their hands
- Encourage social distancing in group settings, ideally a distance of 3 feet.
- Encourage early reporting of any symptoms
- Have those who develop symptoms stay away from the workplace until clinically evaluated
- Consider having workers work from home who could be in the incubation stage (i.e., for 2 weeks after a possible exposure)
- Report any suspected case to the local health department.
- If there is a confirmed case in your workplace, determine the most common contacts with that person and either: 1) encourage them to work from home and/or 2) preclude the close contacts from entering the workplace.

