How does COVID-19 spread?

It spreads through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. This happens most directly when someone is in close contact with an infected person (within 1-2 meters). It may also occur by touching infected surfaces. Some people may spread the virus before symptoms begin, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus is spread. People with symptoms typically have a higher amount of virus in their body and would therefore spread it more easily.

Is this a global pandemic?

According to the WHO, a pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease. This generally means that an epidemic has spread to two or more continents with sustained, person-to-person transmission. The definition does not address the severity of illness. The WHO Director-General said on February 24, 2020, that the WHO is not yet witnessing uncontained global spread, and not yet witnessing large-scale severe death or disease.

The shift from an epidemic to a pandemic changes the focus from containment (quarantine and isolation of the sick) to mitigation (minimizing the impact through public health measures). Mitigation methods may include limitations of mass gatherings and public events, possible school closures, and strengthening public health systems and hospitals. Employers may implement business continuity measures, and remote work options are likely to be encouraged where possible.

What does a global pandemic mean for myself, my family, and my work?

While it is always difficult to think about something new, it is important not to let fear of the unknown drive our responses. We know that this is a respiratory illness, and there are tried and tested ways to deal with this type of condition.

Because we are still learning about this illness, it is important to keep informed. But be sure to get your information from credible and trustworthy sources, such as WHO, CDC, your local health department, and the corporate coronavirus site. Beware of the “infodemic” which so often swirls through social media and news outlets during such times.

Whether we are in a global pandemic or not, everyone can do their part to help stop the spread of germs, by practicing good hygiene measures and following guidance on how to reduce the risk of spreading illness to others.

It’s also important to know that it is not required to buy or to have special equipment or products. Diligent practice of good personal hygiene, and social distancing (maintaining at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing) to the extent possible, will remain the most effective ways to reduce the risk of infection.
On a practical level, it will be useful to prepare for the possibility of working from home, and/or having children home from school for a period of time; or how you would manage if you were required to stay later at work due to business continuity measures being implemented. Consider how you would cope if you were unable to undertake usual external activities with the same frequency or ease.

It is always useful to have essential supplies in the home, in case you were unable to go out for a period of time (two weeks is a useful planning guide). Taking measures to stay healthy, having adequate supplies of prescription and over-the-counter medications, and adopting other non-pharmaceutical measures will be important.

Most importantly, stay calm, focus on the many simple things you can do to reduce the risk of infection for yourself and your family, and follow the guidance of your local public health authority.

What are the symptoms?

- Cough
- Fever (38.0 C or 100.4 F or higher)
- Difficulty breathing
- Fatigue

Other symptoms such as sore throat, and gastrointestinal symptoms may also be present. These symptoms may be mild to severe. Symptoms can appear from 1 day after exposure up to 14 days after exposure.

How do I prevent becoming infected?

- Avoid contact with people who are ill with fever or cough.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently and properly (for at least 20 seconds), particularly before eating, before touching your mouth or eyes, and after using the toilet. If soap and water are not immediately available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Become "touch aware." Be mindful of surfaces you are touching (door handles, elevator buttons, hand rails) and wash hands appropriately afterwards. Try not to touch your face.
- When coughing and sneezing cover your mouth and nose with a flexed elbow or tissue – throw tissue away immediately and wash your hands with soap. Encourage others to do the same.
- Avoid crowded areas or large gatherings to the extent possible. Do not go out if you are sick.
What should I do if I am sick?

- Stay home and away from others. Do not travel.
- Use good hygiene to prevent spreading your illness to others. Cover your mouth with a tissue or with your flexed elbow when coughing and sneezing. Wash your hands afterwards.

In addition, if you have a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, and live in / have traveled in an affected location in the last 14 days:

- Seek medical care. Before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your symptoms and recent travel.
- If you must go out, wear a surgical mask if you have one.

When should I wear a face mask?

You should wear a face mask only if you are sick with a cough or fever and need to seek medical care, or anytime you are interacting with other people.

If local health authorities require people to wear masks in public places or if you are required to wear one in your office or residential building, then follow those local requirements.

Neither the WHO nor U.S. CDC recommends wearing a mask for protection in a community setting.

Those who are required to or choose to use masks should prioritize other preventive measures such as washing hands often with soap and water and staying away from other people when they are sick. Incorrect use of masks can increase the risk of infection. Further information on the use of masks can be found below:

- WHO: Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for the public: When and how to use masks

Note: There is no strong evidence that face masks prevent infection when used by healthy people in public settings. The reasons for this may be that masks are often not used properly (fitted tightly around the nose and mouth); they do not protect against transmission of illness that may come from droplets entering the eyes; and people often unknowingly touch their faces and the outside of the mask, thereby transferring viral particles to their hands.

Is air travel or public transportation safe?

There is very little risk of any communicable disease being transmitted on board an aircraft. Most modern aircraft have air circulation and filtration systems that filter out bacteria, viruses, and other particles and exchange the air a certain number of times per hour (typically 20 – 30 times). Therefore, there is very low risk that any viral particles would be spread throughout an aircraft if there is a sick passenger. When there is a sick passenger, only those within
approximately a 1 to 2-meter seating distance may be at risk, and this would only be in the instance of a subsequently lab-confirmed COVID-19 case.

Additionally, China and other countries are screening people at transportation hubs and many countries are screening passengers for illness or risk upon arrival, further lowering the risk of encountering an ill fellow passenger or risk of infection carried over from a previous flight.

Is it safe to travel to China or other locations with COVID-19 cases?

WBG Senior Management has decided that mission travel to China is suspended until further notice, due to travel and business disruptions caused by outbreak containment measures.

In line with the guidance of the WHO, there are no health-related suspensions for travel to other locations at this time. However, prudent risk evaluation and decisions on criticality of travel are recommended for travel to destinations reporting community transmission of COVID-19. A constantly updated list of such destinations can be found on the CDC Travel Health Advisory page for countries with coronavirus cases.

For Warning Level 3 countries, avoid non-essential travel. For Alert Level 2 countries, older adults and those with chronic medical conditions should consider postponing non-essential travel. For Watch Level 1 countries, practice usual precautions to safeguard your health.

What should I do if I have had contact with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case?

If you have been in close contact with someone who is suspected to have COVID-19 you should self-isolate for a period of 14 days from the last known contact with the ill person. If living with someone who is sick with COVID-19 (and who is not hospitalized), you should not come to work for a period of 14 days after the sick individual is declared free of infection, and you should follow instructions for minimizing your exposure outlined by the U.S. CDC. If living with someone sick with COVID-19, local public health authorities should give you guidance on when you will be able to end your self-isolation.

Do people traveling from affected countries need to self-isolate or be quarantined after their return?

All staff who have been in China during the last 14 days should not return to the workplace until 14 days after their exit from China and are advised to self-isolate and to monitor their health during this period. This applies to all destinations, not just the U.S.

Staff who have returned from other affected locations do not need to self-isolate at this time but should monitor their health for 14 days and not go to work if sick.

Monitoring of health should include a daily temperature check and noting development of any respiratory symptoms, particularly a cough.
Do I need to self-isolate if a member of my household has recently returned from an affected country?

Staff who have household members who recently returned from China are requested to self-isolate and monitor their health for 14 days from the time they first come in contact.

Staff with household members returning from other locations do not need to self-isolate but should monitor their health for 14 days.

What practical steps can I take to address my anxiety about this situation?

It is natural to worry about things that might happen in the future. A practical step you can take is to consider your current health needs and how you can best protect your health and that of your family. Ensure that you have an adequate supply of any prescription medications you or your family members need, know where to go to seek medical care, practice good hygiene such as washing hands frequently, use good cough etiquette, and avoid touching your face, particularly when out in public and if you or family members are sick. It is also good practice to always have a personal/family emergency plan and review this regularly, as well as having a home emergency kit in place that includes food and water that can be stored in the event of an inability to go out from your home for a period of time.

For those that find themselves anxious about the current outbreak, we suggest following the guidance of HSD's Counseling Unit, which outlines ways to reduce anxiety and provides resources for those who need additional help.

Resources:

For additional situational information and guidance, please see the U.S. CDC FAQs.

For psychological support, the following resources are available:

- 24/7 Helpline for urgent psychological needs: +1 (202) 458-5600 | DAMA 5220 85600
- Counseling Unit Main Contact Information (WBG and IMF Staff): +1 (202) 458-4457 | DAMA 5220 84457 | hsdcounseling@worldbankgroup.org
- Family Consultation Service (WBG and IMF spouses, domestic partners, and dependents over 18 years old): +1 (202) 458-5550 | DAMA 5220 85550 | familyconsultationservice@wbfn.org
- Managing Fear and Anxiety over the Novel Coronavirus