

Hertfordshire County Council Public Health Service
Version 2 - 2nd March 2020

COVID-19 (Coronavirus): Frequently Asked Questions

For Latest Information

For Latest Information please go to

www.nhs.uk/coronavirus

www.gov.uk/coronavirus

For latest advice on travel outside the UK please go to

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/advice-for-travellers/>

1. What is coronavirus and should I be concerned?

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world.

Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

It is important to balance the need to take sensible precautions and plan for a possible increase in the outbreak, yet not to cause panic. At present there is no significant community spread of the disease. Nevertheless it is prudent to ensure our practices and plans are in place should the outbreak get worse.

2. What are the signs and symptoms of this new virus?

The symptoms of this new coronavirus (now known as COVID-19) include fever and respiratory symptoms including coughing, sneezing, and shortness of breath. The current evidence is that most cases appear to be mild.

3. What is the current risk level to the UK?

The World Health Organisation has assessed the global risk of the coronavirus outbreak as very high. The UK Chief Medical Officers have raised the risk to the public from low to moderate. This does **not** mean government think the risk to individuals in the UK has changed at this stage, but that government should plan for all eventualities.

4. How does this new coronavirus spread?

Because it's a new illness, we do not know exactly how it spreads from person to person, but similar viruses spread by cough droplets or sneeze droplets. These droplets fall on people in the vicinity and can be directly inhaled or picked up on the hands and transferred when someone touches their face.

How long any respiratory virus survives will depend on a number of factors; for example:

- what surface the virus is on
- whether it is exposed to sunlight
- differences in temperature and humidity
- exposure to cleaning products

Under most circumstances, the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surfaces is likely to have decreased significantly by 24 hours, and even more so by 48 hours.

5. What can I do to reduce my risk of getting coronavirus

We all have a role to play in prevention, especially because the disease can be worse in more vulnerable people. So if we all play our part, we protect everyone. There are things you can do to help stop germs like coronavirus spreading:

Always carry tissues with you and use them to catch your cough or sneeze. Then bin the tissue, and wash your hands, or use a sanitiser gel.

Wash your hands often with soap and water, **especially** after using public transport. Use a sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available.

DO NOT touch your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

Avoid close contact with people who are unwell.

You can find a video on handwashing here for adults

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAwS0UsIEDs>

You can find a video on handwashing for children here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9VjeIWLnEq>

What should I do to prevent catching and spreading the virus?



Wash hands frequently
with soap and water or use a sanitiser gel



Catch coughs and sneezes with **disposable tissues**



Throw away used tissues
(then wash hands)



If you don't have a tissue **use your sleeve**



Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands



Avoid close contact with people who are unwell

Source: NHS

BBC

6. Should people wear face masks to protect themselves from infection?

Face masks play a very important role in clinical settings, such as hospitals but there's very little evidence of widespread benefit from their use outside of these clinical settings.

Facemasks must be worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly and disposed of safely in order to be effective.

The best way to protect ourselves from infections like coronavirus is to wash our hands frequently with soap and water or use a sanitiser gel, as well as always carrying tissues and using them to catch coughs and sneezes, then putting the tissue in a bin.

7. Can coronavirus be treated?

Right now, treatment relies on the basics - keeping the patient's body going, including breathing support, until their immune system can fight off the virus. There is currently no vaccine for the COVID-19 coronavirus. The virus is so new and different that it needs its own vaccine.

Simple hygiene measures like washing your hands with soap and water often, and avoiding people who are unwell, can help stop viruses like coronavirus spreading.

8. How deadly is the coronavirus?

Based on data from 44,000 patients with this coronavirus, the WHO says:

- 81% develop mild symptoms
- 14% develop severe symptoms
- 5% become critically ill

The proportion dying from the disease appears low (between 1% and 2%) - but the figures are currently not fully reliable because we are still learning about the virus, and because we are still in an early stage.

The fact that the disease can be worse in more vulnerable people means we all need to play our part in preventing spread, as outlined in Question 5 above.

9. Where do I get the latest information?

This is a rapidly evolving situation and latest updates can be found on the Gov.uk website [here](#)

For the public <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/>

For professionals <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-background-information>

10. What should community groups do at this stage?

1. Ensure **everyone maintains good hygiene** (we should be doing this already as part of normal good practice) at all gatherings, whether services or other occasions. This includes those who prepare or serve food, those handing out equipment etc or having other direct physical contact with numbers of people.
Provide hand gel at entrances and ensure there is a good supply of soap or hand gel in cloakrooms and kitchens and any other appropriate areas.
2. The best way of protecting us from spread is for everyone to use **universal good hygiene**, - this means everyone, all the time, which will effectively disrupt spread of the virus. So display the public information poster attached, which states:
 - Catch it - sneeze into a tissue

- Bin it – bin the tissue
- Kill it – wash your hands with soap and water
- Do not touch your face unless you've washed your hands

Follow the good hand washing and gel use technique. You can find more here <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/> and a poster here <https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/resources/posters/en/>

3. Ask **anyone with cold or flu symptoms to refrain from attending**
4. Ensure **good regular cleaning of surfaces people touch regularly**, including such things as door handles, light switches etc

11. Why won't the authorities tell us where cases are?

The NHS and Public Health England are in control of this information, not the County Council. And they do not release information on patients because of the laws and duties on the rights of patients to confidentiality.

If we remember we all have a role to play in prevention, we have to assume anyone may be infected. Given that, if you take hygiene precautions only for those you know, you leave yourself completely at risk of being infected by someone you don't

And there are other good reasons for not sharing this:

1. The only way of protecting yourself is hygiene
2. Giving locations wouldn't help anyway – you can't see the virus and there are people with the virus in many places so telling you locations is fairly pointless
3. Knowing may lull you into complacency about people you don't know and won't protect you

12. What do I do if I have flu-like symptoms?

If your test is negative for coronavirus, the hospital or clinical service which took the swab will contact you.

If your test is positive for coronavirus, a hospital doctor or the Public Health England Health Protection Team will contact you

If your test is negative for coronavirus but positive for something else like ordinary seasonal flu, your GP will be asked to contact you

13. If I am feeling unwell with flu-like symptoms what do I do?

It is unlikely currently you will have coronavirus UNLESS

you've recently been to a country or area with a high risk of coronavirus – see [coronavirus advice for travellers](#) **OR**
you've been in close contact with someone with coronavirus

If either of these are the case:

DO NOT go to your GP Surgery or Hospital A and E or Urgent Care Centre

Use the NHS111 Coronavirus Assessment tool here **BEFORE** you ring NHS111
<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>

14. I have been tested for coronavirus, why is there a delay in my results?

Many people are being tested, and more laboratories to undertake testing are being developed, as well as new services for testing. The delay is due to the volume of tests. This is being managed by the NHS and not the County Council.

15. I have been tested for coronavirus, who gives me my results?

This is an issue managed by the NHS so the County Council has no control over this. The NHS inform us that:

If your test is negative for coronavirus, the hospital or clinical service which took the swab will contact you.

- If your test is negative for coronavirus but positive for something else like ordinary seasonal flu, your GP may also be asked to contact you

If your test is positive for coronavirus, a hospital doctor or the Public Health England Health Protection Team will contact you