Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions

What is 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a virus (more specifically, a new coronavirus) identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, China. Chinese authorities identified the new coronavirus, which has resulted in thousands of confirmed cases in China, with additional cases being identified in a growing number of countries internationally. The latest situation summary updates are available on CDC's web page.

Is COVID-19 the same as the SARS virus or MERS?

No. COVID-19 is not the same coronavirus that caused severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003 and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012 but is similar in that it is causing respiratory illness.

What are the symptoms of COVID-2019?

People who are infected with Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) have developed mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms including fever, cough, shortness of breath, and potentially respiratory distress. There are many types of illnesses that can cause these types of respiratory symptoms. Individuals who have these symptoms and have traveled to an area of sustained or widespread transmission (Level 2 or Level 3: CDC Travel Notice) in the last 14 days prior to symptom onset or have had close contact with someone with Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) should call ahead to a healthcare professional and mention your recent travel or close contact.

How is COVID-19 diagnosed?

Diagnosis occurs through laboratory testing of respiratory specimens. Some coronavirus strains cause the common cold and patients tested by their health care provider may test positive for these types. The SARS-Co-V-2 (COVID-2019) strain can only be detected at a public health laboratory.

What are the requirements for testing?
Your healthcare professional will work to determine if testing is appropriate.

Does COVID-19 spread from person to person?

COVID-19 has been shown to spread between people. It's not clear yet how easily COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person. Human coronaviruses typically spread through the air by coughing and sneezing.

How can I help protect myself?

CDC advises that people follow these tips to help prevent respiratory illnesses:
Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Avoid close contact with people who are sick with respiratory symptoms. Avoid non-essential mass gatherings. Stay home when you are sick. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces. If you have not already done so, discuss influenza vaccination with your health care provider to help protect you against seasonal influenza.

Can I still travel to China or other countries where COVID-19 cases have occurred?

CDC recommends avoiding non-essential travel to areas of widespread transmission (Level 3: CDC Travel Notice). If you must travel to an area with a Level 3 travel warning, the current CDC travel notice advises travelers to follow standard precautions, such as hand washing, avoiding contact with people who are ill, and avoiding animals. You should also consult with your health care provider prior to travel, as some individuals may be at increased risk for more severe coronavirus disease. If you are planning to go to an area with a Level 2 travel warning, CDC recommends older adults and those with chronic medical conditions consider postponing non-essential travel. All travelers should follow standard precautions including avoiding contact with sick people and cleaning your hands often by washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 60%–95% alcohol. Some areas have been listed with Level 1 travel warnings for COVID-19 (CDC Travel Notice) . At this time, CDC does not recommend canceling or postponing travel to areas with Level 1 travel warnings. If you travel to an area with a Level 1 travel warning, you should follow the standard precautions listed previously (avoid sick people, wash your hands often).The latest travel updates are available on CDC's web page Traveler's Health.

What if I recently traveled to the outbreak area and got sick?

If you develop a fever and symptoms of lower respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after traveling to an area of sustained or widespread transmission (Level 2 or Level 3: CDC Travel Notice), you should immediately should call ahead to a healthcare professional and mention your recent travel or close contact. Your healthcare professional will work to determine if testing is appropriate.

Is there a vaccine?

No. Currently, there is not a vaccine for COVID-19.

What are the treatments for COVID-19?

Currently, there are no specific treatments recommended for illnesses caused by COVID-19. Medical care is supportive to help relieve symptoms.

What are public health departments in Illinois doing about this situation?

IDPH and local health departments have implemented heightened surveillance to identify and test patients most likely to have COVID-19. Public health experts are communicating with and educating health care providers and other public health partners about the current situation. Measures are being developed to prevent the spread of illness in Illinois. Frequent communication with the public will be available through the IDPH Coronavirus Page. The Rock Island County Health Department is asking clients to practice social distancing while in the clinics.

What should healthcare providers, laboratories and health departments do?

Health care providers and laboratories should report suspect COVID-19 cases immediately (within 3 hours) to their local health department, who should report cases to IDPH within the same time frame. For recommendations and guidance, see the IDPH Coronavirus Page or the CDC's web page 2019 Novel Coronavirus.