

# What do we currently know about the COVID-19 virus?

Human coronaviruses are common throughout the world.

The name “corona” refers to a crown because these viruses have crown-like spikes on their surface when viewed under a microscope. There are many different coronaviruses identified in animals, but only a small number of these can cause disease in humans.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause respiratory infections. It is therefore the kind of virus that causes an infection in your nose, sinuses, upper throat, windpipe and/or lungs.

Most coronaviruses aren't dangerous. Coronaviruses vary from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

The most recent coronavirus disease is COVID-19.

COVID-19 can affect your upper respiratory tract (sinuses, nose and throat) or lower respiratory tract (windpipe and lungs). Infections range from mild to serious to life-threatening.

The best available information indicates that COVID-19 most probably originated in what is called “wet markets” in China – markets where fresh meat, fish and other perishable produce is sold. This could mean that this latest coronavirus has an animal origin. Irrespective of its origin, what we do know at this stage, is that the virus is transmitted (spreads) from human to human.

## Is there more than one strain of COVID-19?

It's normal for a virus to change, or mutate, as it infects people.

Some recent studies suggest that COVID-19 has done just that. They found two strains, which they named “L” and “S”. The S type is older, but the L type was more common in early stages of the outbreak. They think one may cause more cases of the disease than the other, but they're still working on what it all means.

It is important to note at this stage that the medical profession is still learning and discovering new information about this virus. This means that all our questions cannot yet be answered.

## Who is most at risk for COVID-19?

People of all ages can be infected by COVID-19.

Older people and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, lung diseases, heart diseases, compromised immune systems, etc.) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus.

The WHO however advises people of all ages to take steps to protect themselves from the virus, as one can never proactively know with certainty how any individual's body will respond to a virus.

### How is COVID-19 treated?

Treatment is supportive (providing oxygen for patients with shortness of breath or treating a fever, for example).

To date, there is no specific antiviral treatment (vaccine) available.

Antibiotics do not treat viral infections. However, antibiotics may be required if a bacterial secondary infection develops because of COVID-19 (e.g. pneumonia).