What is COVID-19?
Coronavirus disease 2019, or “COVID-19,” is an infection caused by a specific virus called SARS-CoV-2. It first appeared in late 2019 in the city of Wuhan, China. People with COVID-19 can have fever, cough, and trouble breathing. Problems with breathing happen when the infection affects the lungs and causes pneumonia. Experts are studying this virus and will continue to learn more about it over time.

How is COVID-19 spread?
Experts think COVID-19 first spread to people from animals in China that had the virus. But it can also be spread from person to person, similar to the flu. This usually happens when a sick person coughs or sneezes near other people. Most cases of COVID-19 are in China. But it has spread quickly, and there have been cases in many other countries, including the United States. Most of these happened when people got the infection and then traveled to another country. But in some cases, the virus then spreads to other people. So, there are now smaller outbreaks in several different countries.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?
Symptoms usually start a few days after a person is infected with the virus. But in some people it can take even longer for symptoms to appear. Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Trouble breathing
- Feeling tired
- Muscle aches

Most people have mild symptoms. Some people have no symptoms at all. But in other people, COVID-19 can lead to serious problems like pneumonia, not getting enough oxygen, or even death. This is more common in people who are older or have other health problems.

Should I see a doctor or nurse?
If you have a fever, cough, or trouble breathing and might have been exposed to COVID-19, call your doctor or nurse. You might have been exposed if either of the following happened within the last 14 days:

- You lived in, or traveled to, an area where lots of people have the virus – the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has information about which areas are affected. This can be found on their website: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html.
- You had close contact with a person who has the virus – This generally means being within about 6 feet of the person.
- If your symptoms are not severe, it is best to call your provider’s clinic before you go in. They can tell you what to do and where to go. If you do need to go to the clinic or hospital, you will need to put on a face mask. The staff might also have you wait some place away from other people.
- If you are severely ill and need to go to the clinic or hospital right away, you should still call ahead. This way the staff can care for you while taking steps to protect others.
Your provider will do an exam and ask about your symptoms. They will also ask questions about any recent travel and whether you have been around anyone who might be sick.

**Will I need tests?**
Yes. If your doctor or nurse suspects you have COVID-19, they test samples of fluid taken from inside your nose and mouth. They might also do tests on a sample of mucus that you cough up, as well as your urine and stool (bowel movements). These tests can all show if you have COVID-19 or another infection. Your doctor might also order a chest X-ray to check your lungs.

**How is COVID-19 treated?**
Most people with COVID-19 have only mild illness and can rest at home until they get better. If you have more severe illness, you might need to stay in the hospital, possibly in the intensive care unit (ICU). There is no specific treatment for the infection, but the doctors and nurses in the hospital can monitor and support your breathing and other body functions, and make you as comfortable as possible. You might need extra oxygen to help you breathe easily. If you are having a very hard time breathing, you might need to be put on a ventilator to help you breathe.

**Can COVID-19 be prevented?**
There are things you can do to reduce your chances of getting COVID-19:
- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Avoid touching your face with your hands.
- Try to stay away from people who have any symptoms of the infection.
- Some experts recommend avoiding travel to certain countries where there are a lot of cases of COVID-19.

**NOTE:** Experts do not recommend wearing a face mask if you are not sick, unless you are caring for someone who has (or might have) COVID-19.

If someone in your home has COVID-19, there are additional things you can do to protect yourself:
- **Keep the sick person away from others** – The sick person should stay in a separate room and use a separate bathroom if possible.
- **Use face masks** – The sick person should wear a face mask when they are in the same room as other people. If you are caring for the sick person, you can also protect yourself by wearing a face mask when you are in the room. This is especially important if the sick person cannot wear a mask.
- **Be extra careful around body fluids** – If you will be in contact with the sick person’s blood, mucus, or other body fluids, wear a disposable face mask, gown, and gloves. If any body fluids touch your skin, wash your hands with soap right away.
- **Clean often** – It’s especially important to clean things that are touched a lot. This includes counters, bedside tables, doorknobs, computers, phones, and bathroom surfaces.
- **Wash hands** – Wash your hands with soap and water often.

There is not yet a vaccine to prevent COVID-19.

**How can I prepare for a possible COVID-19 outbreak?**
It is hard to predict where future outbreaks might happen. The best thing you can do to stay healthy is to wash your hands regularly, avoid close contact with people who are sick, and stay home if you are sick.

If there is an outbreak in your area, schools or businesses might close temporarily. If this happens, or if someone in
your family gets sick with COVID-19, you might need to stay at home for a period of time. There are things you can do to prepare for this. For example, you might be able to ask your employer if you can work from home, or take time off, if it becomes necessary. You can also make sure you have a way to get in touch with relatives, neighbors, and others in your area. This way you will be able to receive and share information easily.

If you or others in your family are anxious about COVID-19, keep in mind that most people do not get severely ill or die from it. While it helps to be prepared, and there are things you can do to lower your risk, try not to panic.

Where can I go to learn more?
As we learn more about this virus, expert recommendations will continue to change. Check with your provider or public health official to get the most updated information about how to protect yourself.

You can also find more information about COVID-19 at:
- United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- World Health Organization (WHO) [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

NOTE: This information is not intended nor recommended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your own physician or other qualified healthcare professional regarding any medical questions or conditions.