

How Is Coronavirus Diagnosed and Treated?

The novel coronavirus, causing the disease known as COVID-19, is a highly infectious virus that causes flu-like symptoms in infected people. It is easily spread from person to person through contact with droplets. Once infected, respiratory symptoms can begin to occur 2-14 days after exposure. Symptoms may be relatively mild and include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. More severe cases can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure, and death.

Treatment for COVID-19 focuses on controlling symptoms. COVID-19 is a viral disease, and since antibiotics are not effective against the virus, they should not be used.

If you are experiencing respiratory symptoms and have been in an area where COVID-19 has been found, or if you've been exposed to infected patients, it's important to seek out immediate medical attention. If your healthcare provider suspects COVID-19, they may notify their local health department to see if testing for the virus is needed. Testing may be available through local or state health departments or through some commercial laboratories across the US.



A negative test usually means there has been no novel coronavirus identified so the person may not be ill with COVID-19. However, it is always important to remember that it is possible to have a negative test very early in the disease, when levels of the virus are too low to detect.

Treatment for COVID-19

If you test positive for COVID-19, your treatment will depend on the severity of your infection. The first step, however, will be to prevent the rapid spread of the virus by isolating yourself from others. In mild cases, the CDC recommends that people isolate at home, only leaving home to get medical care. Going into public while actively sick increases the risk of spreading the virus.

To reduce the risk of spreading the virus to other members of your household, the CDC recommends restricting yourself to specific rooms and avoiding public areas like kitchens and shared bathrooms. The CDC also recommends avoiding contact with animals—like other coronaviruses, COVID-19 may infect animals. Until we know more about which animals are vulnerable, it's safer to simply avoid any pets or animals.

As of March 2020, there is no vaccine or antiviral medicine that is approved to prevent or treat COVID-19. Instead, treatment focuses on reducing symptoms and making the patient more comfortable while their body fights off the infection.

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In severe cases, hospitalization is required. Patients may require IV fluids and other measures like supplemental oxygen. If you are isolated due to COVID-19 infection, you will be released when you are medically stable and have appropriate support at home.

It's unknown how long infected patients continue to shed the virus after an active infection, or if people who don't experience symptoms actively shed the virus.

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Symptoms of Coronavirus Disease 2019.
3. World Health Organization. Coronavirus.