

Glossary of Terms for the Coronavirus 2019-nCoV

Coronavirus:

- Coronaviruses make up a category of viruses that can cause fever, breathing difficulties, pneumonia and diarrhea. Some are potentially fatal. Others can cause a certain percentage of common colds. The name comes from the Latin word “corona,” which means crown. Under a microscope, these viruses are characterized by circles with spikes ending in little blobs.
- Coronaviruses originate in animals — like camels, civets and bats — and are usually not transmissible to humans. But occasionally a coronavirus mutates and can pass from animals to humans and then from human to human, as was the case with the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic in the early 2000s.

Animal-human interface: The points of contact between animals and humans — when people cut down forests and set up dwellings where forest animals are still prevalent, for example. Some types of diseases spread from animals to humans at this interface.

Contact tracing: Identifying people who may have come into contact with a person infected with a disease.

Droplet: The spray produced by sneezing, coughing or even talking. Droplets can spread disease when an infected person coughs or sneezes — and the spray lands on a nearby person’s mouth, nose or eyes. It can also spread when a person touches a body part or a surface with infected droplets, then touches their face.

Emerging disease: A disease that occurs in the population of a certain geographic region for the first time, or a disease that’s been present at low levels in a region but then rapidly reaches new peaks in the number of cases reported.

Epidemic: A sudden increase in the number of cases of a disease in a particular geographic area, beyond the number health officials typically expect. For example, CDC calls HIV/AIDS, which affects 1.2 million people in the United States, an “epidemic.”

Incubation period: The period between exposure to an infection and the appearance of the first symptoms. [CDC](#) believes at this time that symptoms of 2019-nCoV may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 after exposure. However, the exact incubation period is still unknown.

Isolation: Separating infected and sick individuals from healthy individuals. Hospitals commonly put sick patients in isolation to prevent the spread of disease.

MERS or Middle East Respiratory Syndrome: A viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus called MERS-CoV. It was first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012 and has since spread to several other countries, including the United States. Most people infected with MERS-CoV develop severe respiratory illness, including fever, cough and shortness of breath.

Novel coronavirus: A coronavirus strain that has not been previously identified, according to the CDC. The Wuhan coronavirus, for example, is novel because it is a new respiratory virus that was first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

Outbreak: An increase that occurs in a relatively small geographic area or among a small group of people. For example, CDC called two cases of sickness from drinking raw milk (listeriosis) in the United States an “outbreak.”

Pandemic: An epidemic spanning many countries and/or several continents. The difference between an outbreak, an epidemic and a pandemic can be murky and depends on the opinions of scientists and health officials.

Person-to-person contact: How a disease might spread from one person to another. This can happen in many ways — by kissing, touching, having sex, exchanging bodily fluids, sneezing or coughing.

Prevention: How to avoid being exposed. Currently there is no vaccine for 2019-nCoV. Everyday preventive actions will help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- 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.

Quarantine: The separation or restriction of movement of individuals who appear to be healthy but may have been exposed to an infectious disease to see if they become sick. The length of the quarantine depends on the incubation period for the disease. During the Ebola outbreak, for example, it was 21 days.

Reproductive rate or the R0, pronounced “R naught”: A number that indicates the infectiousness of a virus or a pathogen in a particular location. “For every one person infected, how many others will be infected?” says Nolan. So, for example, if the reproductive rate for a disease in one geographic area is 11, that’s the average number of expected secondary cases caused by a single infected person.

Reservoir: An animal, plant or environment in which a disease can persist for long periods of time. For example, some bats serve as a reservoir for rabies and can spread the disease by biting humans.

SARS or Severe acute respiratory syndrome: A viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus called SARS-CoV. SARS was first reported in Asia in February 2003. The illness spread to more

than two dozen countries in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia before the SARS global outbreak of 2003 was contained.

Screening: A health check to see whether a person has a disease — often by taking their temperature and then asking questions about symptoms if the temperature is high.

Symptoms: Any subjective evidence of disease.

Transmission: How a disease is transferred. This happens in different ways. There's direct transmission: person-to-person contact and droplet spread. And there's indirect transmission: for example, consuming contaminated food and water, getting bitten by a disease-carrying mosquito or tick or breathing in a microbe carried by dust.

Treatment: None. There is no specific antiviral treatment currently recommended for 2019-nCoV infection. People infected with 2019-nCoV should receive supportive care to help relieve symptoms. For severe cases, treatment should include care to support vital organ functions.

Zoonotic: Any disease that spreads from animals to people. The animals can range from tiny ticks to lumbering cattle.

Sources for glossary terms adapted from:

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) & [National Public Radio](#)