Spreading facts, not misconceptions, about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

Situation

• On December 31, 2019, Chinese health authorities identified a new coronavirus disease (now referred to as COVID-19) through a series of reported cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, China.

What are coronaviruses?

• Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause respiratory illnesses.

• Some coronaviruses cause no or mild illness, like the common cold, but other coronaviruses can cause severe illness.

• A novel coronavirus (CoV) is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans.

How is COVID-19 transmitted?

• Human coronaviruses can spread from person-to-person.

• Common ways the virus can spread include:
  
  o Coughing and sneezing
  o Close personal contact (such as touching or shaking hands)
  o Infected surfaces and fecal contamination (rare)

• Prompt identification and isolation of ill people has limited spread outside of the main outbreak areas.

Where did the COVID-19 virus come from?

• The source of COVID-19 is still unknown.
Many of the initial cases were linked to the Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan City, China, but several had no exposure to animal markets.

**What are the symptoms of infection?**

• Symptoms reported in the COVID-19 cases have ranged from mild to severe and can include:
  - Fever
  - Cough
  - Difficulty breathing

• In severe cases, the illness can result in pneumonia or kidney failure. Death can also be an outcome.

**Is there a treatment for COVID-19?**

• There is no specific treatment for disease caused by a novel coronavirus. However, many of the symptoms can be treated.

• Consult your health care provider if you have symptoms that are getting worse or if you have recently travelled to a region where severe coronaviruses are known to occur. **Please be sure to call ahead to ensure proper infection control measures can be taken.**
Addressing misconceptions, about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

Misconception – COVID-19 is caused by people eating bats or snakes

• How this new strain of coronavirus emerged in humans is still unknown

• Most cases reported at the start of the outbreak had a link to a seafood and live animal market. However, several of the initial cases had no exposure to animal markets

• Public health officials and researchers are studying the virus genes and working hard to identify the source of COVID-19

Misconception – I will get COVID-19 if I eat Chinese food

• The origin of the new strain of coronavirus is still unknown. Public health officials and partners are working hard to identify the source of COVID-19

• Most cases reported at the start of the outbreak had a link to a seafood and live animal market. However, a growing number of cases report no exposure to animal markets

Misconception – The COVID-19 virus is spread through the air like measles

• There is much to learn about this new disease, but human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through:
  
  o Droplets that spread when coughing or sneezing
  o Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
  o Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching mouth, nose or eyes before washing hands

• There would be many more cases if COVID-19 was commonly spread through the air

Misconception – The COVID-19 virus can survive on packages or products shipped from China

• Coronaviruses don’t survive for long periods of time on surfaces; we expect the same for the COVID-19 virus
• The risk of spread from products or packages shipped over a period of days or weeks and stored at varying temperatures is very low

• Currently, there is no evidence to support the transmission of the COVID-19 virus through imported goods

**Misconception – House pets spread COVID-19**

• Currently, there is no evidence that companion animals such as dogs or cats can be infected with the COVID-19 virus

• It is always a good idea to wash your hands with soap and water after contact with pets. This protects you against various common bacteria such as *E. coli* and *Salmonella* that can pass between pets and humans

**Misconception – COVID-19 only affects older people**

• People of all ages can be infected with COVID-19. Reported cases have ranged from the very young to the very old

• Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease), appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus

**Misconception – A vaccine for COVID-19 already exists**

• Work on a vaccine started as soon as the virus’ genetic sequence was shared. However, there is currently no vaccine for COVID-19

• It usually takes several months for a vaccine to be ready for testing in people

• Research groups worldwide are executing plans to test vaccines, treatments and other measures to stop COVID-19

**Misconception – Antibiotics or other medicines can prevent or treat COVID-19**

• Antibiotics do not work against viruses, only bacteria. Antibiotics should not be used against COVID-19
• To date, there is no specific medicine recommended to prevent or treat COVID-19. However, some specific treatments are under investigation, and will be tested through clinical trials

• Individuals infected with the virus will receive appropriate care to relieve and treat symptoms

Misconception – Keeping your throat moist will prevent COVID-19

• There is no evidence that keeping your throat moist by drinking water will prevent COVID-19

• The best way to protect yourself from respiratory viruses:
  o Hand hygiene (wash hands often; use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available)
  o Respiratory hygiene (cover coughs or sneezes with a tissue or arm and wash afterwards)
  o Avoiding close contact, when possible, with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing

Misconception – Wearing a mask in public places will protect me from getting COVID-19

• Wearing face masks can be useful in preventing the spread of coronavirus if worn by someone who is ill

• Masks are not recommended for healthy people in public settings as there is a higher risk of contamination when not disposed or worn properly

Misconception – There are different ways to properly wear a surgical mask

• There is only one way to wear a mask properly and that is with the coloured side facing outwards

• Wearing face masks properly can be useful in preventing the spread of coronavirus if worn by someone who is ill. Masks are not currently recommended for healthy people in public settings
Misconception – We should avoid public places and close schools

• When there is limited disease spread, isolating people who are not close contacts of a case is considered an excessive measure

• Novel coronavirus infections are not currently considered more severe than many other known respiratory diseases in the community (e.g. influenza, colds), as such, school closures are not required

Misconception – The number of COVID-19 cases in Canada is under-reported

• There are a limited number of COVID-19 cases in Canada

• Travellers returning to Canada from areas affected by the COVID-19 outbreak are being screened for symptoms

• Potential cases have been promptly identified and isolated to prevent the spread of the virus

Misconception – COVID-19 is more deadly than influenza

• Information on novel coronavirus infections is still emerging

• In Canada, with limited numbers of COVID-19 cases, Canadians should protect themselves against a more common illness like influenza

  • Influenza causes about 12,200 hospitalizations and 3,500 deaths in Canada each year
  • Influenza continues to be ranked among the top 10 leading causes of death in Canada
What you can do to learn more about the novel coronavirus and protect yourself and your family

The COVID-19 outbreak in China reminds us of the need to protect ourselves and others this cold and influenza season. You can help prevent the spread of illness by:

• washing your hands regularly
• not touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
• avoiding close contact with people who are sick
• staying home when you're sick
• covering your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your arm
• cleaning frequently touched objects and surfaces

When you travel:

• Avoid high-risk areas such as farms, live animal markets and areas where animals may be slaughtered
• Avoid contact with animals
• Avoid surfaces with animal droppings or secretions on them
• Avoid contact with sick people
• Avoid eating raw or undercooked animal products
• Be aware of the local situation and follow local public health advice
• If you become sick when you are travelling or after you return, avoid contact with others except to see a health care professional. Call ahead and tell them:
  o your symptoms
  o where you have been travelling or living
  o if you had direct contact with animals or close contact with a sick person
• If you feel sick during your flight to Canada or upon arrival, inform the flight attendant or a Canadian border services officer
Resources

Region of Peel – Public Health: [http://peelregion.ca/coronavirus/](http://peelregion.ca/coronavirus/)

Coronavirus information line: 1-833-784-4397

[Telehealth](#): 1-866-797-0000

Canadians travelling abroad are encouraged to consult the [Travel Health Notice for China](http://travel.gc.ca) on travel.gc.ca.

[Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) advice for the public: Myth busters](#)