Covid-19 (Coronavirus)

The typical symptoms of COVID-19 are fever and a cough that may progress to pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties

A cluster of cases of pneumonia that occurred in Wuhan, Hubei Province China during December 2019, were confirmed in early January 2020 as caused by a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). SARS-CoV2 may have originated from an unknown animal source, but is mainly transmitted from human to human by breathing in droplets from the nose or mouth of an infected person or by touching the infected droplets on surfaces, then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. National and international spread of this virus has resulted in COVID-19 cases being reported worldwide.

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of a new continuous cough or high temperature or a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell. Symptoms range from mild to life threatening. Most cases report a mild illness, but some individuals will develop pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. Those who are elderly or have underlying health problems are more likely to develop severe disease. There is a higher risk of infection and of severe disease in Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups in the UK but the reasons for this are currently not clear. Long term health effects may occur for some people who have had COVID-19 infection (mild infection or hospitalised) and is sometimes referred to as long COVID.

Clinical trials to evaluate potential new vaccines and treatments are ongoing and authorisation being sought with regulatory authorities. Information about vaccines and priority groups for vaccination in the UK is available. A number of treatments for COVID-19 are being used and trialled in hospital settings. Medical care aims to relieve and treat the symptoms. Those who develop symptoms of COVID-19 should self-isolate and arrange to have a test.

Prevention

COVID-19 is transmitted through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes and direct or indirect contact with these secretions. In addition to respiratory secretions, other coronaviruses have been detected in blood, faeces and urine.

To reduce the risk of coronavirus infection all travellers should:

- maintain good hand and personal hygiene. Wash hands regularly with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds. An alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol can also be used.
- avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms, or who appears unwell.
- be aware of the surfaces touched and avoid sharing personal items.
- follow guidelines on social distancing measures which may be in place. Face coverings are required in some locations where social distancing is not possible and contact with new people is likely. Face coverings do not replace social distancing; all other recommended precautions should be followed.

To reduce the risk of passing coronavirus to others, anyone with respiratory symptoms should:
- cover the nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or flexed elbow.
- use paper tissues only once and dispose of them carefully, then clean hands with soap and water or alcohol based disinfectant gel.
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home and work environment.

Travellers currently in countries that are reporting cases of COVID-19 should follow local public health advice.

Current Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) travel advice should always be checked along with advice regarding risk of disease which is available on our Country Information pages.

Individuals entering or returning to the UK are required to follow additional UK border measures which may include self-isolation. See current UK border control guidance.

A COVID-19 vaccination programme was introduced in the UK in December 2020: Coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine.

International travellers have not been identified as a priority for the COVID-19 vaccine, but would be eligible if in certain high risk groups. Information on priority groups for coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination is available from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Resources
- Public Health England: Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- World Health Organization: Coronavirus
- European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC): COVID-19 pandemic
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- NaTHNaC: COVID-19 (coronavirus): general advice for travellers
- BMJ Best Practice: Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)