COVID-19

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

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2 and is mainly spread between humans by breathing in droplets from the nose or mouth of an infected person or by touching infected droplets on surfaces, then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. COVID-19 cases have been reported worldwide.

SARS-CoV-2, like all other viruses mutate (change) over time, resulting in new forms (variants). SARS-CoV-2 and emerging variants of this virus are monitored carefully worldwide. Most are determined to be Variants of Interest (VOI) and are not generally a cause for concern. Others may be more infectious and cause more severe illness. Also tests, treatments and vaccines may be less effective. These variants are called Variants of Concern (VOC). VOC continue to circulate worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) provide details in their publication WHO Weekly Epidemiological Updates.

While some individuals who are infected with the virus will not experience any symptoms, others may experience a new continuous cough, high temperature, change or loss of sense of taste and smell. Other symptoms may include shortness of breath, unexplained tiredness, lack of energy, muscle ache, not wanting to eat or not feeling hungry, headache, sore throat, stuffy or runny nose, diarrhoea and feeling or being sick.

In most cases COVID-19 is a mild illness, but some individuals can develop breathing difficulties and more severe illness such as pneumonia; complications may be life-threatening. Older people and those with underlying health problems are more likely to develop severe disease. For some people, COVID-19 can cause symptoms that last weeks or months after the infection has gone. This is sometimes called post-COVID-19 syndrome or "long COVID".

A number of COVID-19 vaccines have been approved for use worldwide and significantly reduce the likelihood of severe illness, hospital admission and death.

While mild symptoms can be managed at home, a number of treatments for severe COVID-19 are being used and further treatments continue to be evaluated in clinical trials.

Prevention

To reduce the risk of coronavirus infection, all travellers should:

- Ensure they are up to date with their COVID-19 vaccination courses and boosters, as recommended in the UK vaccination programme.
- 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.
- Be aware of the surfaces touched and avoid sharing personal items.
- Follow guidelines on social distancing measures which may be in place, avoid time spent in

crowded areas and close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms, or who appears unwell.
- Wear face coverings when recommended or required.
- Let fresh air in by opening a window or door where possible if sharing a space with others.

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.
- Wear a face mask when advised.

Detailed advice for people in England with COVID-19 symptoms is available. Advice for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales may be different. Travellers abroad should follow the local public health advice of their host country.

Travellers should check and subscribe to updates from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) travel advice for their destination/s, along with advice regarding specific country disease risks which is available on our Country Information pages.

COVID-19 vaccine

A number of different COVID-19 vaccines are in use in the UK. All have met strict safety and effectiveness standards. Currently COVID-19 vaccination has become a targeted offer only to those at higher risk of severe COVID-19.

Further information on the UK programme including how to get the vaccination, is available on the NHS website and the UK Health Security Agency 'Green book'.

Resources

- European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC): COVID-19 pandemic
- GOV.UK: Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- UKHSA and DHSC: COVID-19: guidance for health professionals
- UKHSA: COVID-19 variants identified in the UK
- World Health Organization: Coronavirus
- World Health Organization. Tracking SARS-CoV-2 variants
- MHRA: guidance on coronavirus (COVID-19)
- UKHSA: COVID-19 vaccination programme
- World Health Organization: COVID-19 Vaccines Emergency Use Listing (EUL) issued