

IFEH UPDATE

CORONAVIRUS – COVID-19

8 MARCH 2020

The Emerging Situation

Global concern began in late 2019 about a newly emerging coronavirus, and since the beginning of 2020, as it started to spread around the world, it gained particular attention from the World Health Organisation (WHO).

This most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease; COVID-19 is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans, and the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

What we currently know about COVID-19

Coronaviruses (CoV) are one group of a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). Coronaviruses are 'zoonotic', meaning they are transmitted between animals and people (however, according to WHO, there is no evidence that companion animals or pets such as cats and dogs have been infected or could spread the virus that causes COVID-19).

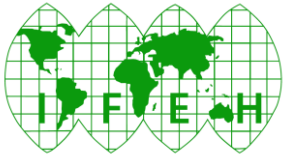
According to the WHO, the most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell. Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. The mortality rate is thought to be about 2% - i.e. the percentage of people who have contracted the disease who have died. However, this estimate should be treated with caution as there may be under-reporting and fatalities may be attributed to other causes.

What we need to know as individuals

People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek immediate medical attention through local reporting systems.

Is important to know:

- The incubation period is still under investigation. Most estimates of the incubation period for COVID-19 range from 1-14 days, most commonly around five days.



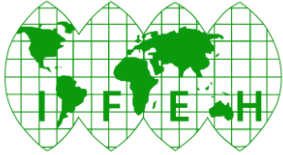
- There is no vaccine. As a recently identified virus, investigations are underway for its development but it is not expected to be universally available until late 2020.
- Treatment for infection with this new coronavirus is directed at the signs and symptoms presented.
- Antibiotics are not effective against viruses, only bacteria. 2019-nCoV is a virus and, as such, antibiotics should not be used for its prevention or treatment. It will not work and may contribute to increased resistance to antimicrobials.
- Internationally, the risk assessment process is constantly updated, according to the evolution and distribution of the outbreak.
- It is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, studies suggest that may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment). It is thought to be susceptible to high temperatures.

Follow the latest WHO Situation Reports with recommendations and advice for the public through this website:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>

The WHO recommendations and advice for the public as of the Situation Report – 48 from 8 March 2020 were the following:

- *If you are not in an area where COVID-19 is spreading or have not travelled from an area where COVID-19 is spreading or have not been in contact with an infected patient, your risk of infection is low. It is understandable that you may feel anxious about the outbreak. Get the facts from reliable sources to help you accurately determine your risks so that you can take reasonable precautions (see [Frequently Asked Questions](#)). Seek guidance from WHO, your healthcare provider, your national public health authority or your employer for accurate information on COVID-19 and whether COVID-19 is circulating where you live. It is important to be informed of the situation and take appropriate measures to protect yourself and your family (see [Protection measures for everyone](#)).*
- *If you are in an area where there are cases of COVID-19 you need to take the risk of infection seriously. Follow the advice of WHO and guidance issued by national and local health authorities. For most people, COVID-19 infection will cause mild illness however, it can make some people very ill and, in some people, it can be fatal. Older people, and those with pre-existing medical conditions (such as cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease or diabetes) are at risk for severe disease (See [Protection measures for persons who are in or have recently visited \(past 14 days\) areas where COVID-19 is spreading](#)).*



The role of Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs)

IFEH encourages everyone to check out the reports on the WHO web site (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/>) and The Lancet Coronavirus Resource Centre (<https://www.thelancet.com/coronavirus>)

These will assist health workers and researchers working under challenging conditions to bring this outbreak to a close.

Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) working in a multitude of spheres strive ensure that all the physical environments in which we work, eat, live and play are safe. They all have the same common goal: to protect human health by minimizing risks, and eliminating dangers, in natural and built environments.

Quoting the words of the Tee Eng Ong from Malaysia Association of Environmental Health (MAEH) “The basis of environmental health involves understanding the impacts of environmental and human-made hazards as well as protecting human health and ecological systems against these threats. The scope includes studying the impacts of human-made chemicals on wildlife or human health, as well as how the environment influences the spread of diseases”.

Environmental Health Practitioners have a wealth of expertise in multiple disciplines such as epidemiology, toxicology, food safety, waste management among others.”

As Environmental Health Practitioners we specifically emphasise maintaining good health hygiene and respiratory practices i.e.

- thorough hand washing
- preventing droplet spread infection when coughing or sneezing
- Disinfecting surfaces regularly.
- Maintaining a distance if possible from persons coughing and sneezing.
- The role of EHPs at ports of entry both airports, border posts and harbours.
- Good veterinary practice and choice meat sources
- Timely health education and advice

Stay tuned – other useful links are set out below

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>

<https://www.thelancet.com/coronavirus/research>

<https://www.elsevier.com/connect/coronavirus-information-center>

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china?fbclid=IwAR3gkaBwxUkJycUb8QGFiXJZmngC9O3JxzkCPFDBedt9DEILyX0VaDrCv8w>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/summary.html>