



AWARENESS

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

A new strain of coronavirus has surfaced in China, sparking fears of uncontrolled spread further afield, as health officials around the globe work to ensure that the virus is controlled and contained.

The coronavirus is a large family of viruses, responsible for diseases ranging from the common cold to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Although this particular strain has not been seen before, Arnaud Fontanet, head of the department of epidemiology at Institut Pasteur, has confirmed that this strain is 80 per cent genetically identical to SARS, though it seems to be a milder version.

The World Health Organization (WHO) was alerted to the outbreak on December 31st, 2019. Originating in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China, the virus did not match any known viruses, which brought on fears of a repeat of the SARS epidemic in 2002 and 2003. While the severity of the virus is still unclear, there have been fatalities. Most of the deaths occurred in older people who had underlying medical conditions, like hypertension, diabetes or coronary heart disease.

The virus is thought to have been transmitted from animal-to-human

With a seafood and animal market in Wuhan being the suspected source, China's National Health Commission has confirmed that the so called '2019-nCov' has been passed from person-to-person and has infected some of their medical staff. Symptoms include a fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing. No vaccine or specific treatment for 2019-nCov is available – care is supportive.

With confirmed cases reported in Thailand, Japan, Republic of Korea and the United States of America, authorities have implemented quarantine and screening measures for travellers from Wuhan. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are closely monitoring the outbreak, with recommendations for reporting of the disease and the evaluation of patients who have travelled to Wuhan City or have been in contact with laboratory-confirmed patients.

How can you protect yourself?

The key recommendations from WHO and the CDC to reduce exposure and transmission, are:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.
- When coughing or sneezing, do so into a tissue or the crook of your elbow – throw the tissue away immediately after and wash your hands.
- If you have a fever, cough or difficulty breathing, seek medical care and share your travel history.
- If you are visiting live markets in areas currently experiencing cases of 2019-nCov, avoid unprotected contact with any live animals or surfaces in contact with animals.
- Avoid the consumption of raw or undercooked animal products and handle any raw meat, milk or animal organs with care, so as not to cross contaminate.

China has placed Wuhan and two of its neighbouring cities under quarantine, as well as banning large gatherings. WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced at a news conference, that while the situation in China is an emergency, it had not yet become a global health emergency.