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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Q: What are coronaviruses?**

**A:** Coronaviruses are common viruses that most people get some time in their life. Human coronaviruses usually cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory tract illnesses.

Coronaviruses are named for the crown-like spikes on their surface. There are three main sub-groupings of coronaviruses, known as alpha, beta and gamma, and a fourth provisionally-assigned new group called delta coronaviruses.

Coronaviruses may also infect animals. Most of these coronaviruses usually infect only one animal species or, at most, a small number of closely related species. However, SARS-CoV can infect people and animals, including monkeys, Himalayan palm civets, raccoon dogs, cats, dogs, and rodents.

### **Q: How common are human coronavirus infections?**

**A:** People around the world commonly get infected with human coronaviruses. However, one exception is SARS-CoV. Since 2004, there have not been any known cases of SARS-CoV infection reported anywhere in the world.

### **Q: Who can get infected?**

**A:** Most people will get infected with human coronaviruses in their life time. Young children are most likely to get infected. However, you can have multiple infections in your life time.

### **Q: How do I get infected?**

**A:** The ways that human coronaviruses spread have not been studied very much, except for SARS. However, it is likely that human coronaviruses spread from an infected person to others through:

- the air by coughing and sneezing, and
- close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands.

These viruses may also spread by touching contaminated objects or surfaces then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

**Q: When can I get infected?**

**A:** In the United States, people usually get infected with human coronaviruses in the fall and winter. However, you can get infected at any time of the year.

**Q: What are the symptoms?**

**A:** Human coronaviruses usually cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory tract illnesses of short duration. Symptoms may include runny nose, cough, sore throat, and fever. These viruses can sometimes cause lower-respiratory tract illnesses, such as pneumonia. This is more common in people with cardiopulmonary disease or compromised immune systems, or the elderly.

**Q: How can I protect myself?**

**A:** There are currently no vaccines available to protect you against human coronavirus infection. You may be able to reduce your risk of infection by:

- washing your hands often with soap and water,
- not touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, and
- avoiding close contact with people who are sick.

For information about hand washing, see [CDC's Clean Hands Save Lives!](http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/) (<http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>)

**Q: What should I do if I get sick?**

**A:** If you have an illness caused by human coronaviruses, you can help protect others by:

- staying home while you are sick,
- avoiding close contact with others,
- covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, and
- keeping objects and surfaces clean and disinfected.

**Q: How do I get diagnosed?**

**A:** Laboratory tests can be done to confirm whether your illness may be caused by human coronaviruses. However, these tests are not used very often because people usually have mild illness. Also, testing may be limited to a few specialized laboratories.

Specific laboratory tests may include:

- virus isolation in cell culture,
- polymerase chain reaction (PCR) assays that are more practical and available commercially, and
- serological testing for antibodies to human coronaviruses.

Nose and throat swabs are the best specimens for detecting common human coronaviruses. Serological testing requires collection of blood specimens. Your healthcare provider will decide what tests should be ordered.

**Q: Are there treatments?**

**A:** There are no specific treatments for illnesses caused by human coronaviruses.

Most people with coronavirus illness will recover on their own. However, some things can be done to relieve your symptoms, such as:

- taking pain and fever medications (Caution: Aspirin should not be given to children), and
- using a room humidifier or taking a hot shower to help ease a sore throat and cough.

If you are sick, you should:

- drink plenty of liquids, and
- stay home and rest.

If you are concerned about your symptoms, you should see you healthcare provider.

*Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).*