

CORONAVIRUS (CoV)

– Latest information, advice and answers to questions you may currently be asking!

Introduction

Coronaviruses (CoV) are 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)*. A novel Coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people. Detailed investigations found that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans and MERS-CoV from dromedary camels to humans. Several known Coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans.

Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.

Standard recommendations to prevent infection spread include regular hand washing, covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, thoroughly cooking meat and eggs. Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.

Below are some answers to questions which many of you may be asking,

For further information contact the BPIF Human Resources or HS&E Team

Q	What is a Coronavirus?
A	Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses found in both animals and humans. Some infect people and are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).
Q	What safeguards do Manufacturers have to put in place around food preparation and risk of infection?
A	Retailers already follow strict hygiene procedures within food preparation areas. No increased procedures are required.

Q	Have Manufacturers begun to experience any disruption to their supply chains? If so, what counter-measures are they taking?
A	Some disruption in the supply chain is normal for this time of year, especially following the extended Chinese New Year where some factories remain shut or are running on reduced staffing levels. Members sourcing from Wuhan, China will have been affected the most, but report minimal disruption elsewhere. Retailers are continuing to monitor the supply chain closely. They are adept at managing disruption and moving sourcing to other countries so there is very limited immediate impact. The next few months will be critical, if factories remain closed or the virus affects other countries we could source from there is likely to be more of an impact, although that might not be apparent until later in the year. Retailers will do everything they can to ensure the quality and availability British consumers expect but that could be challenging if the virus continues to spread.
Q	How long does the virus live? Is there a risk to consumers on products shipped from China?
A	Based on current advice there should be no risk to consumers. Current estimates suggest it can live up to 24-30 hours outside the body. Much less than the sea freight and air freight times (weeks) from China. In addition, the virus is temperature sensitive and would not tolerate the sub-zero low temperatures typically found in the cargo hold of an aeroplane.
Q	Is the new virus the same as SARS?
A	No, 2019-nCoV is from the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV) but it is not the same virus.
Q	How dangerous is it?
A	As with other respiratory illnesses, infection with 2019-nCoV can cause mild symptoms including a runny nose, sore throat, cough, and fever. It can be more severe for some persons and can lead to pneumonia or breathing difficulties. More rarely, the disease can be fatal. Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as, diabetes and heart disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus.
Q	What can I do to protect myself?
A	Stay aware of the latest information on the outbreak, available on World Health Organisation website, and take care of your health by doing the following: Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub if your hands are not visibly dirty Why? Washing your hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub eliminates the virus if it is on your hands. Maintain social distancing – maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and other people, particularly those who are coughing, sneezing and have a fever. Why? When someone who is infected with a respiratory disease, like 2019-nCoV, coughs or sneezes they project small droplets containing the virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the virus

Q	Should I wear a mask to protect myself?
A	Wearing a medical mask can help limit the spread of some respiratory disease. However, using a mask alone is not guaranteed to stop infections and should be combined with other prevention measures including hand and respiratory hygiene and avoiding close contact – at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and other people. WHO advises on rational use of medical masks thus avoiding unnecessary wastage of precious resources and potential mis-use of masks. This means using masks only if you have respiratory symptoms (coughing or sneezing), have suspected 2019-nCoV infection with mild symptoms or are caring for someone with suspected 2019-nCoV infection. A suspected 2019-nCoV infection is linked to travel in an area in China where 2019-nCoV has been reported, or close contact with someone who has travelled from China and has respiratory symptoms.
Q	How do I put on my mask, use, take off and dispose of a mask?
A	1. Before putting on a mask, wash hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water 2. Cover mouth and nose with mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask 3. Avoid touching the mask while using it; if you do, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water 4. Replace the mask with a new one as soon as it is damp and do not re-use single-use masks 5. To remove the mask: remove it from behind (do not touch the front of mask); discard immediately in a closed bin; wash hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
Q	Can humans become infected with the 2019-nCoV from an animal source?
A	Detailed investigations found that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans in China in 2002 and MERS-CoV from dromedary camels to humans in Saudi Arabia in 2012. Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans. As surveillance improves around the world, more coronaviruses are likely to be identified The animal source of the 2019-nCoV has not yet been identified. This does not mean you can catch 2019-nCoV from any animal or from your pet. It's likely that an animal source from a live animal market in China was responsible for some of the first reported human infections. To protect yourself, when visiting live animal markets, avoid direct unprotected contact with live animals and surfaces in contact with animals. The consumption of raw or undercooked animal products should be avoided. Raw meat, milk or animal organs should be handled with care, to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods, as per good food safety practices.
Q	Can I catch 2019-n-CoV from my pet?
A	No, at present there is no evidence that companion animals or pets such as cats and dogs have been infected or have spread 2019-nCoV.

Q	Can the 2019-n-CoV be transmitted from person to person?
A	Yes, the 2019-nCoV causes respiratory disease and can be transmitted from person to person, usually after close contact with an infected patient, for example, in a household workplace, or health care centre.
Q	Who can catch this virus?
A	People living or travelling in an area where the 2019-nCoV virus is circulating may be at risk of infection. At present, 2019-nCoV is circulating in China where the vast majority of people infected have been reported. Those infected from other countries are among people who have recently travelled from China or who have been living or working closely with those travellers, such as family members, co-workers or medical professionals caring for a patient before they knew the patient was infected with 2019-nCoV. Health workers caring for persons who are sick with 2019-nCoV are at higher risk and must protect themselves with appropriate infection prevention and control procedures. WHO is continuously monitoring the epidemiology of this outbreak to better understand where the virus is circulating and how people can protect themselves from infection.
Q	Who is at risk from developing severe illness?
A	While we still need to learn more about how 2019-nCoV affects people, thus far, older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as diabetes and heart disease) appear to be more at risk of developing severe disease.
Q	How does the virus spread?
A	The new coronavirus is a respiratory virus which spreads primarily through contact with an infected person through respiratory droplets generated when a person, for example, coughs or sneezes, or through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose. It is important that everyone practice good respiratory hygiene. For example, sneeze or cough into a flexed elbow, or use a tissue and discard it immediately into a closed bin. It is also very important for people to wash their hands regularly with either alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
Q	How long does the virus survive on surfaces?
A	It is still not known how long the 2019-nCoV virus survives on surfaces, although preliminary information suggests the virus may survive a few hours. Simple disinfectants can kill the virus making it no longer possible to infect people.
Q	What's the difference between illness caused by 2019-n-CoV infection, the flu or a cold?
A	People with 2019-nCoV infection, the flu, or a cold typically develop respiratory symptoms such as fever, cough and runny nose. Even though many symptoms are alike, they are caused by different viruses. Because of their similarities, it can be difficult to identify the disease based on symptoms alone. That's why laboratory tests are required to confirm if someone has 2019-nCoV. WHO recommends that people who have cough, fever and difficulty breathing should seek medical care early. Patients should inform health care providers if they have travelled in the 14 days before they developed symptoms, or if they have been in close contact with someone with who has been sick with respiratory symptoms.

Q	Is it safe to receive a package from China or any other place where the virus has been identified?
A	Yes, it is safe. People receiving packages are not at risk of contracting the new coronavirus. From experience with other coronaviruses, we know that these types of viruses don't survive long on objects, such as letters or packages.
Q	Are antibiotic effective in preventing and treating the 2019-n-CoV?
A	No, antibiotics don't work against viruses, only bacterial infections. The novel coronavirus is a virus and, therefore, antibiotics should not be used as a means of prevention or treatment.
Q	Are there specific medicines to prevent or treat 2019-n-CoV?
A	To date, there is no specific medicine recommended to prevent or treat the novel coronavirus. However, those infected with 2019-nCoV should receive appropriate care to relieve and treat symptoms, and those with severe illness should receive optimized supportive care. Some specific treatments are under investigation and will be tested through clinical trials. If you want to protect yourself from getting infected with the new coronavirus, you should maintain basic hand and respiratory hygiene, and safe food practices and avoiding close contact, when possible, with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing. The following measures are not specifically recommended as 2019-nCoV remedies as they are not effective to protect yourself and can be even harmful: Taking vitamin C; Smoking; Drinking tradition herbal teas; Wearing multiple masks to maximize protection; Taking self-medication such as antibiotics In any case, if you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing seek medical care early to reduce the risk of developing a more severe infection and be sure to share your recent travel history with your health care provider.
Q	What should I do if I'm looking to travel overseas?
A	The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) has shared seven important ways to protect travelling employees from the current Coronavirus outbreak; • Ensure you have proportionate and robust policies, procedures and controls in place and communicate them to all relevant parts of the organisation, providing information, instruction and training as appropriate. • Consider whether the travel is absolutely necessary: can you achieve the same result with video-conferencing and spare the organisation and traveller the risk, time, cost and environmental impact? • If travel is deemed necessary then you should effectively, but proportionately, manage the risk, with controls identified and implemented according to the nature and severity of the risk. Controls should be identified through a travel risk assessment and travellers themselves should be involved in the process. • Always know where your workers are and where they are going. Some travel management systems provide tracking and alert functions, and there are also live location tracking products using GPS in either equipment or smartphone apps. • Should your travellers become involved in an incident or emergency situation, you will need to support them. Consider using a travel assistance scheme such as those provided by business insurers such as International SOS. • Provide relevant information, instruction and training to travellers, the nature and extent of which should be identified during the risk assessment process. • Finally, don't forget your travellers' wellbeing. Frequent international travel has been shown to have negative effects on both physical and mental health, with situations such as a disease outbreak creating further sources of concern.

Q	What should I do if somebody returning to the UK from abroad presents with cold like symptoms?
A	If you have any concerns then you should speak to the employee and ask them to seek medical advice as you do have a duty of care to all employees. Employers should always check current guidance from the Department of Health or the relevant public health body on any health conditions.
Q	Do employees need a GP certificate if we request them to stay at home
A	No, it is unlikely that a GP would provide a certificate as they have not been diagnosed and therefore it is the company taking precaution.
Q	Would employees be eligible for SSP if they did not have symptoms but travelled returned from a country where 2019-n-CoV is prevalent?
A	If you instruct an employee to stay at home paying employees would be the least risky approach in any circumstance. If an employee appears well and is ready and willing to work, it is advisable to pay their wages for any period you request they remain at home. If they do however report any ill health, your usual sick pay policy can then be applied. To minimise business/operational disruption you may wish to consider flexible working arrangement if at all possible for any affected employee. Similar considerations may wish to be given to any vulnerable employees e.g. pregnant and/or disabled employees who might be at risk (where relevant). Do keep the situation under review and needless to say, it would be advisable to conduct relevant risk assessments on an ongoing basis.
Q	I have instructed an employee to stay at home, how long an employee should remain off work?
A	In relation to an employee who does not have the symptoms associated with the coronavirus, but who has recently travelled to China or another affected region or has been in contact with someone who has or with an infected person, the employer should check advice from the relevant public health body on whether or not it is necessary on risk grounds to ask such people not to attend work. Information can change relatively quickly we cannot tell you what it will recommend at the point the employees are due to return to work. However, it is open to the company to agree with the employee that they will work from home or return to work only if they do not develop symptoms during the incubation period.
Q	I have an employee who has returned from abroad and has been diagnosed with 2019-n-CoV
A	The employee or next of kin will have the detail of the precautions they need to take and obviously they will not be in work and will be subject to normal sick pay processes and procedures. If the employee had returned to work and other employees were potentially exposed and they were concerned then they should speak to their GP or if you have an Occupational Health Service you could provide this detail so that employees allay any concerns they make have.

Q	I have an employee who is concerned about contracting 2019-n-CoV and does not wish to attend work, can I insist they attend work?
A	An employer can require employees concerned about contracting the coronavirus to attend work. The fear of contracting an illness is not sufficient reason for failing to attend work, and an employer faced with an employee refusing to come to work will be entitled to take disciplinary action for unauthorised absence. An employer could also stop paying an employee who refuses to attend work on the basis that the employee is failing to perform their part of the contract. However, you may wish to take a different approach with employees who are vulnerable, i.e. those at high risk of developing more severe symptoms from the coronavirus, including employees with respiratory problems or poor immune systems and pregnant employees. Employers should check guidance from the Department of Health or the relevant public health body on any health conditions that could cause a vulnerability to becoming seriously ill with the coronavirus.