

COVID-19: Information on symptoms, transmission

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Information about the spread of COVID-19 continues to evolve.

"We're still learning a lot about this [virus](#), and much of the information that we know now comes from understanding of other respiratory viruses that we have experience with in the past," says Dr. Nipunie Rajapakse, a Mayo Clinic pediatric infectious diseases specialist.

"The coronaviruses typically cause [respiratory illnesses](#)," says Dr. Rajapakse. "They can range in severity, from very mild—maybe even asymptomatic illness—all the way to severe disease or sometimes rarely even death."

Check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website for additional updates on COVID-19.

Covid-19 Symptoms

"The main symptoms that have been described with COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath," says Dr. Rajapakse. "Interestingly, unlike many other respiratory viruses, only a minority of patients have been reporting upper respiratory symptoms like [runny nose](#) or sore throat, although some people have reported those."

"Coronaviruses, including COVID-19, can create a spectrum of illness, and, so, some people will be very mildly affected and some people can have more severe disease," says Dr. Rajapakse. "So the severity of illness can range from having a cold or a flu-type illness all the way to needing to be hospitalized or be in an intensive care unit."

COVID-19 Transmission Similar To Influenza

"Based on what we know about this outbreak so far, as well as information about how other [respiratory viruses](#) are transmitted, the primary route of transmission for this is thought to be [respiratory droplets](#)," says Dr. Rajapakse. "Respiratory droplets are usually transmitted when someone coughs or sneezes, and someone else either inhales it or touches something that the virus particle has landed on, and then touches their own eyes, nose or mouth. Generally, a respiratory droplet can transmit about 3 to 6 feet from the person who has coughed

or sneezed."

Protect Yourself

"The best thing you can do to protect yourself and your family from getting infected. No. 1 is to wash your hands," says Dr. Rajapakse. "The second thing is to practice what we call respiratory etiquette. That means coughing or sneezing into your elbow or into a tissue, and then washing your hands well afterward. We know viral particles that end up on your fingers and hands can be transmitted to other people, and, so, that's one way to protect yourself and your family."

"The other main thing that we would encourage people is to stay home if they're feeling ill with cough and fever especially. This avoids exposing people at school or at work to infection and [illness](#)," says Dr. Rajapakse.

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