

Are you in danger of catching the coronavirus? 5 questions answered

January 27 2020, by William Petri



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The Chinese government has quarantined Wuhan, a port city of 11 million people, and it has restricted travel to and from several other cities, including Beijing, to contain the coronavirus that has [sickened](#)

[more than 800 people and killed at least 25](#) as of Jan. 23, 2020. A case has been reported in [Seattle](#), and officials [are monitoring a patient with a possible case in College Station](#), Texas. This raises the question: Will this spread—to me?

Am I at risk?

Not now, because currently, every case of the novel coronavirus is [linked to Wuhan](#).

There are lots of different coronaviruses that group into three types. The common cold can be caused by both alpha and betacoronaviruses.

Coronavirus was never really taken that seriously until [2003](#), when a coronavirus jumped species—likely from bats to humans via civets—and led to [SARS](#), or [severe acute respiratory syndrome](#). This species-jumping ability of coronaviruses is being observed again, now in Wuhan at the seafood market. This coronavirus is in the betacoronavirus group. [China has now put travel restrictions in place](#) to limit spread from Wuhan.

What's the big concern with this virus?

For the novel coronavirus from Wuhan, there is no vaccine, and we're lacking a specific therapy. So it is key to limit spread through quarantine of infected individuals and by tracing of contacts.

What is so unusual about this coronavirus?

This is a coronavirus that has never been seen in humans before. It likely came from bats, and it's much more serious than the common

cold coronavirus. This is only the third time that we've seen a coronavirus jump species from animals to humans. The concern is that this coronavirus is going to behave like SARS and [MERS](#), or Middle East respiratory syndrome in 2012, both of which were serious.

Do the deaths appear to be among people of a certain age?

Many were in older men with pre-existing conditions.

How can I stay safe?

First of all, you need not be concerned about catching this right now. Practice the same precautions that you would to prevent catching a cold. Viruses that cause the common cold are on surfaces of handrails and doorknobs, so wash your hands, use sanitizers and stay home when you are sick.

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