



2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Background

At the Ministry of Health, we monitor disease outbreaks and health emergencies at home and abroad, including Dengue, Chikungunya and TB, through to emerging threats such as the outbreak of the novel (new) coronavirus in Wuhan, China.

This is a rapidly evolving situation which we are monitoring carefully but based on the available evidence, the current risk to the BVI population is low/medium

Here are answers to some of the questions many people have. We'll update this information as new information becomes available.

Disease Basics

Q. What is Wuhan novel coronavirus?

A: Wuhan Novel Coronavirus is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China. As its name suggests, it is a type of virus.

They can cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory tract illnesses, like the common cold and even more severe and fatal diseases like severe acute respiratory syndrome. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world.

Q: Is 2019-nCoV the same as the SARS virus or MERS?

A: No. The 2019 nCoV is **not** the same/identical coronavirus that caused severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003 and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012.

It is however closely related to SARS and similar in that it is causing respiratory illness.

Q: What is the source?

A: Currently unknown.

Public Health Agencies and collaborating partners are working hard to uncover the source. However, genetic analyses suggest that it originated from an animal reservoir- potentially bats.

Q: Should I be concerned?

A: Yes, this is a serious public health threat.

Reported illnesses have ranged from infected people with little to no symptoms to people being severely ill and dying.

Of note, the fatality (death) rate is very low (approximately 2%), with most victims between the ages of 50-89 and/or with pre-existing conditions like diabetes, hypertension or heart disease.

Please be mindful that the complete clinical picture with regard to 2019-nCoV is still unclear.

Investigations are still ongoing to learn more.

Q: How does the virus spread?

A: Routes of transmission have yet to be fully determined. The 2019-nCov probably originated from an animal source but now seems to be spreading from person-to-person.

It is not clear yet how easily 2019-nCoV spreads from person-to-person. From studying previous human coronaviruses (e.g. SARS and MERS) we know they typically spread through the air by coughing and sneezing.

Members of public are advised to remain vigilant and observe good personal hygiene practices.

Q: How long is the incubation period (i.e. the time between contracting the virus and appearance of the first signs)?

A: The incubation period is 2–14 days before signs of disease.

Medical Information

Q: Are there any signs and symptoms that I should be aware of?

A: Typical signs and symptoms of the Wuhan coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

Q: Who are the at-risk groups?

A: Generally, more severe symptoms occur in persons with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long term conditions like diabetes, heart disease, cancer and chronic lung disease.

Q: Is there treatment for this novel coronavirus?

A: At present no.

No specific treatment or anti-viral drug for 2019-nCoV is currently available. Supportive treatment is provided based on the patient's clinical condition.

Q: Are any vaccines available?

A: No vaccines are available right now, although several organizations are currently working on one.

Chances are it might not be ready in time for this epidemic. For the SARS outbreak it took researchers approximately 20 months to get a vaccine ready for clinical trials (human testing).

By then, the outbreak had been contained with public health measures like isolating infected people, case detection, contact tracing and setting up quarantines.

Q: Can we test people for Wuhan novel coronavirus and how does this work?

A: The BVI presently does not have an assured testing capability test for this disease. We hope to by February 16th, 2020.

It is a complex test which can differentiate this type of coronavirus from any other coronavirus. Samples for testing will be sent to CARPHA's reference laboratory.

Current Situation and Public Health Response

Q: What is the current risk level?

A: The risk level varies according to the geographical location. See below:

- China: Very High.
- Global: High
 - a. *The World Health organization reassessed the global threat level from moderate.*
- Caribbean: Low-Medium.
 - a. No confirmed cases of Wuhan coronavirus have been detected in the Caribbean. The rumors of active transmission and/or confirmed cases in St. Lucia and Jamaica is false.
- B.V.I: Low-Medium.
 - a. The current risk to the BVI population has been assessed as **low**. This has been raised from very low due to current evidence on the ability for the virus to spread between people and its improvement.
- Individual: Variable (ranging between low-medium) as the risk to individuals is dependent on exposure. Some people will have an increased/higher risk of infection, like healthcare workers caring for 2019-nCoV patients and other close contacts.

For the general public, who are unlikely to be exposed to this virus, the immediate health risk from 2019-nCoV is considered low.

Q: How do we determine the risk level?

A: Several factors are taken into account to determine the risk level such as:

- the number of cases,
- the speed at which new cases are being identified and
- other information like how easily it spreads from person to person.

Q: Can we stop the virus from coming to the BVI?

A: No.

There are **no** system of checks, devices or protocols that can offer absolute protection because of the incubation period of the virus.

Some people might only show symptoms 14 days after exposure to an infected person.

Q: Shouldn't we keep people at the airport until we're sure they're not sick?

A: Many people who develop symptoms will get them after leaving the airport and so our priority is providing BVI residents and travellers with the latest information to make sure they know what to do if they experience symptoms.

The BVI AirPort Authority and airline representatives, BVI Customs and Immigration, BVIHSA and MHSD have an established plan to respond if people contact us to say they have symptoms and have recently travelled to China or an affected country.

Q: Are we monitoring all international flights with passengers who may have transferred from other flights?

A: We are! The Health Service Authority will meet any flights carrying passenger/passengers from Wuhan, China if the Tower receives advance notice.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Health is ready to provide advice and support to travellers if they feel unwell.

Although China has announced that it is restricting flights in and out of Wuhan, when they resume, the BVI would ensure that:

- A broadcast message to passengers is made in the arrival halls at ports of entry encouraging travellers to report their illnesses and practice preventative measures.
- Support in accordance with current operating procedures by the BVIHSA and MHSD teams to any self-declaring passenger, as required

Enhanced monitoring of flights will also be kept under continuous review and expanded to other departure points if necessary.

Q: What measures are being taken to protect the BVI?

A: Our approach is multifold.

- The implementation of thermal imaging technology at the ports to increase detection of cases.
- Increased screening at all Ports-of-Entry to detect probable cases and distribute materials to all arriving passengers. For example:
 - Travellers coming from China and other affected countries entering the BVI will be required to fill out a short questionnaire about their travel, possible signs and symptoms and contact information.
 - Passengers will be given a Health Alert Card, on the back of the card will be a list of health facilities to visit if they become ill and what sign and symptoms to look for and what actions to take thereafter.
 - Any passengers that are visibly ill will be directed to a separate area of the port where they will be managed and moved to a health care facility; in this case the Dr. D. Orlando Smith Hospital.
- Enhanced monitoring and surveillance. This helps us track disease trends, forecast spread, investigate cases and ensure that the public, especially travelers get the right information about what to do if they become unwell.
- Enhanced Health Services Preparedness and response to treat and isolate cases and conduct contact tracing.
- Provision of timely, accurate educational material to the public and widespread hygiene promotion using various channels and targeted media to reach multiple communities. For example:
 - Posters, banners and leaflets will contain information about the 2019 N-CoV that will be made available to the passengers at the airports and seaports.
- Increased local multi-sectorial collaboration, data sharing and training of personnel.
 - For example, healthcare professionals have received advice covering initial detection and investigation of possible cases, infection prevention and control, and clinical diagnostics so they are well prepared to advise or assist anyone who is suspected of having Wuhan novel coronavirus.
 - Guidance and training of front line personnel on hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette.
- Increased regional and international collaboration.
 - PAHO/WHO, Public Health England and CARPHA are willing to share protocols to treat and/or manage cases of imported infections as well as stand ready to assist.

For more information, please contact the Ministry of Health and Social Development at 468-2274.

Prevention

Q: Should I be doing anything to protect myself if I'm in the BVI?

A: We recommend that the public continue to monitor the situation via:

- Ministry's GIS platform,
- Press releases and
- Accredited sources like the World Health Organization (WHO), Public Health England (PHE), Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Unfortunately, outside of basic hygienic/wellness practices, there isn't much you can do to protect yourself from coronaviruses especially since it can be transmitted from person to person.

We therefore advise the public to:

- Maintain strict hand washing hygiene, washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with dirty hands.
- Avoid close contact with sick people
- And if you become sick, protect others by:
 - Self-isolating (i.e. staying home until you are well!)
 - Avoiding close contact with others
 - Covering your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.
 - Reminding persons to cover their nose or mouth when sneezing or coughing.
 - Keep objects and surfaces in your home or workspace clean and disinfected with the recommended concentration of solution.

Q: What should I do if I had close contact with someone who has 2019-nCoV?

A:

- Stay home except to get medical care
 - Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Do not use public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.
- Separate yourself from other people in your home
 - As much as possible, stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home. If possible, use a separate bathroom.
- Call ahead before visiting your doctor

- If you have a medical appointment, call the healthcare provider and tell them that you have or may have 2019-nCoV infection. This will help the healthcare provider's office take steps to keep other people from getting infected or exposed.
- Wear a facemask
 - Wear a facemask when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) and before you enter a healthcare provider's office.
 - People who live with you should also wear a face mask.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in a lined trash can and wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
 - If soap and water are not available, immediately clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol and rub vigorously for 10 seconds.
- Clean your hands
 - See hand-washing procedure above.
- Avoid sharing personal household items
 - Have separate tableware (e.g. cutlery, plates) from other household members. After using items, wash thoroughly with soap and water.
- Monitor your symptoms
 - Seek immediate medical attention if symptoms develop or worsen.
 - Before seeking care, please call your healthcare provider and tell them that you have, or are being evaluated for, 2019-nCoV infection.
 - Remember to wear facemask before leaving home.

Q: Should I wear a facemask to prevent me from catching the coronavirus?

A: No.

At this point, the Ministry of Health is not advising the use of facemasks (especially the N95 mask) for members of the general public.

The **most** important action that people can take to protect themselves from coronavirus is regular hand- washing and good respiratory etiquette.

Travel Advisory

Q: What's the current travel advice?

A: The Ministry strongly advises that BVI Islanders **avoid all “non-essential”** travel to China and to other countries affected by the 2019 n-CoV.

If you are traveling to Wuhan or other affected areas, you should:

- Maintain good hand, respiratory and personal hygiene
- Avoid visiting animal and bird markets or people who are ill with respiratory symptoms.
- Seek medical attention if you develop respiratory symptoms within 14 days of visiting Wuhan, either in China or on their return to the BVI.
 - Phone ahead before attending any health services and mention your recent travel to the city.

2019-nCoV and Animals

Q: Should I be concerned about animals or animal products imported from China?

A: The Ministry of Health does not have any evidence to suggest that animals and/or their products pose a risk for spreading 2019-nCoV.

Q: Should I avoid contact with pets or other animals if I contract and/or become sick from 2019 novel coronavirus?

A: We advise not to handle pets or other animals while sick. Although we have not received reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with 2019-nCoV, some types of coronaviruses can cause illness in animals and spread between animals and people.

Until we know more, avoid contact with animals and wear a facemask if you must be around animals or care for a pet.