

Novel Coronavirus FAQs

What is coronavirus disease 19?

An outbreak called coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19) that started in Wuhan, China, has now spread to multiple countries, including the United States. Health officials have confirmed cases in Minnesota and several other states. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, most patients with confirmed coronavirus disease 19 infection have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath. Some patients have had other symptoms including muscle aches, headache, sore throat or diarrhea. We consider any new infectious disease a serious concern and are taking precautions.

What is the risk for Minnesotans?

- Health officials have confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Minnesota. For current information on Minnesota cases, visit the Minnesota Department of Health website.
- The CDC reports that those who have been infected have had a range of illness severity from mild to severe. A very small percentage of those infected have died or had severe illness.
- In addition to the health risk for individual Minnesotans, any widespread outbreak presents a potential for economic and social impacts.
- There is much more to learn about how coronavirus disease 19 spreads and how common it is to have mild disease or severe disease. Investigations are ongoing.

What can Minnesotans do to protect themselves?

The best available guidance for avoiding coronavirus disease 19 is to take the same precautions you take for avoiding colds and flu:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
- Cover your cough and sneeze. Cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you're sick.
- Stay informed. Visit the Minnesota Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) websites often.

How should I prepare?

As always, be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home. Keep enough food, regular prescription drugs and other necessities on hand in case you need to stay home and are not able to easily go out. Make plans to care for sick household members and know what you'd do if there are school closures or child care program closures.

Is there a vaccine?

Research is underway to prevent coronavirus disease 19 but is not expected for some time.

Do I need to wear a mask?

At this point, the CDC does not recommend the use of face masks as a preventative measure for the general public. Face masks are typically used in clinical settings to prevent spread of diseases from ill patients to health care workers who are in close contact with them.

What are the recommendations for attending school, work or other community gatherings?

Based on what we know now about coronavirus disease 19 and what is known about its spread, the Minnesota Department of Health and Minnesota Governor Walz have closed schools beginning March 18 through March 27 by executive order. The CDC has recommended limiting gatherings to no more than 50 people. As always, we recommend that people stay home when sick, cover their cough and practice good hand hygiene.