

New type of coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

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Coronaviruses...

Coronaviruses were first identified in the mid-1960s. They can infect humans and various animals. Coronaviruses can cause various diseases in humans, ranging from common colds to dangerous or even potentially fatal diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Although serious diseases caused by corona viruses, such as SARS or MERS, were less easily transmitted than influenza in the past, they have nevertheless led to major outbreaks, including in hospitals.

The current outbreak is caused by a novel coronavirus that is genetically closely related to the SARS virus. Many properties of the virus are still unknown, such as ease of transmission, severity of the resulting diseases, the animal in which it occurs, and the exact source of the outbreak. It is currently assumed that the first patients were infected at the beginning of December on a market in Wuhan that was closed on 01.01.2020.

Is the new coronavirus transmitted from person to person?

Although Chinese authorities initially assumed that all the patients were infected on the market, it is now known that the new coronavirus can also be transmitted between humans. There have even been cases of health care workers becoming infected while treating patients. Information is nevertheless still lacking on exactly how the virus is transmitted. Apparently, it is not easily transmittable to date.

How long is the incubation period?

Authorities currently assume that the incubation period can take up to 14 days.

What are the symptoms of coronavirus?

Common coronaviruses usually cause mild cold symptoms with coughs and sniffles. However, certain coronaviruses can also cause severe infections of the lower respiratory tract and lead to pneumonia. Although the new coronavirus seems to be associated with a more severe disease course, most deaths have so far occurred in patients who were previously suffering from severe underlying diseases.

How can you protect yourself against infection?

The spread of respiratory diseases can be prevented by maintaining good hand hygiene, coughing and sneezing etiquette and a safe distance from the sick, especially in regions reporting cases of novel coronavirus. Considering the flu epidemic, however, it is a good idea to take such measures everywhere and at all times.

How can you track and assess the course of the outbreak abroad?

You should consult the information provided by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) at the link below on a daily basis (www.rki.de) The RKI is in close contact with the WHO. A team of specialists at the RKI summarises the information once a day ("Epidemic Intelligence") and then makes it available to other authorities and the public.

Where can I find out whether taking a trip to an affected country is still safe?

Health recommendations for trips abroad are given by the Foreign Office (AA) (www.auswaertiges-amt.de). Up-to-date information on the safety situation in individual affected countries can be found on the AA's country pages on the Internet.