

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions



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Acronyms and abbreviations used in this document:

- **2019-nCoV:** 2019 Novel Coronavirus
- **CDC:** US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
- **COVID-19:** Coronavirus Disease 2019
- **HI-EMA:** Hawaii Emergency Management Agency
- **HDOH:** State of Hawaii Department of Health
- **MERS:** Middle East Respiratory Syndrome
- **SARS:** Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
- **SARS-CoV-2:** Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2
- **WHO:** World Health Organization
- **HNL:** Daniel K. Inouye International Airport

This document provides reliable and up-to-date information to the general public during the continuing COVID-19 global pandemic. Key messages are the importance of preventive measures, such as

- ***frequent hand-washing***
- ***practicing social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic***
- ***avoiding touching your face with dirty hands***
- ***staying home when you are sick***
 - *Do not go to work, school, and other activities if you are feeling ill).*

Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and shortness of breath or trouble breathing.

OVERVIEW

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a new respiratory virus that was first identified in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, in Hubei Province, in December 2019. It has since spread across China and around the world, with major outbreaks occurring in parts of Asia and Europe and the United States. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and on March 11 declared a pandemic (global outbreak of a disease). The most updated numbers can be found at the HDOH website: health.hawaii.gov/covid19.

HDOH is urging all residents to prepare for the possibility that COVID-19 will spread in our communities. You can learn what to do by visiting the HDOH website at: health.hawaii.gov/docd/advisories/novel-coronavirus-2019/#do.

What is the correct name of this outbreak's disease and the virus that causes it? Isn't it called 2019-nCoV?

Global experts on viruses have officially named the virus causing the outbreak "SARS-CoV-2." This is an abbreviation of "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2." After

researching the new coronavirus, scientists determined it is closely related to the virus that caused the SARS epidemic in 2002 and 2003. The virus that caused SARS is known as SARS-CoV, so this new coronavirus is called SARS-CoV-2.

Although the virus is known as SARS-CoV-2, the illness it causes is now officially called COVID-19 (short for coronavirus disease 2019). Shortly after the outbreak first started in Wuhan, China, the virus and illness were often referred to as “2019 Novel Coronavirus,” which was usually abbreviated as “2019-nCoV.” The name “COVID-19” is expected to replace “2019 Novel Coronavirus” and “2019-nCoV,” although for a while the older names may still be in use.

What are coronaviruses?

They are common in many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats, and bats. Rarely, these animal coronaviruses can infect people and then spread between people.

Human coronaviruses are also common throughout the world and can cause mild to moderate illness (for example, “the common cold”). Some coronaviruses that infect humans are known to cause severe illness, like the coronaviruses that cause MERS and SARS.

COVID-19 is a pneumonia-type illness caused by a new (or novel) coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 that originated in Wuhan, China. It may have originated in animals, but it can now be spread from person-to-person.

So is COVID-19 the same as SARS and MERS?

No, they are different coronaviruses.

How does COVID-19 spread?

Although SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) likely came from an animal source, it is now primarily spread from person-to-person. Some viruses are very contagious (like measles), while other viruses are less so. It’s not clear yet how easily COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person. The main way most coronaviruses (including the common cold) spread is through the droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. A person may be infected when those droplets land in one’s mouth or nose, or possibly eyes.

SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Patients with COVID-19 have reported mild to severe respiratory illness, including the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing

Some patients may not report fever, especially the very young, elderly, immunosuppressed, and people taking certain fever-lowering medications.

How long does it take for symptoms to appear?

CDC believes the symptoms of COVID-19 may appear as early as 2 days after exposure and as long as 14 days after exposure.

Should I be tested for COVID-19 infection?

You should call ahead to a healthcare provider and mention recent travel or close contact if both of the following are true:

- You have traveled to an area with widespread sustained community transmission in the past two weeks.
- You have symptoms of respiratory illness (such as cough or shortness of breath).

If these are both true, the healthcare provider will work with the Hawaii Department of Health (HDOH) to determine if you need to be tested.

You can also check out the CDC's "Coronavirus Self-Checker" to see if you should contact a healthcare provider: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html.

People who have traveled to areas that have community spread of COVID-19 should do the following:

- Monitor their health for 14 days after leaving those areas.
- Call their healthcare provider for guidance and tell them about their symptoms and travel history if they develop a fever or cough.

You can find a list of countries with widespread sustained community transmission of COVID-19 at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers.

What is the test for SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19? Can any laboratory in Hawaii test for it?

SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) is detected through laboratory testing of respiratory specimens and serum (blood). Healthcare providers who think their patients may have COVID-19 can work with HDOH to have their specimens tested. Testing can be performed at the Hawaii State Laboratories Division, at CDC in Atlanta, Georgia, and at some commercial labs.

How is COVID-19 treated?

There are no specific antiviral treatments for COVID-19. People who are infected should receive supportive care to help relieve symptoms.

How long is a person with COVID-19 infection contagious?

At this time, CDC and others are studying available data to better understand this. Very likely, as with other coronaviruses, a person is infectious as long as they are ill. However, we continue to monitor the situation to update the information.

Are there complications from COVID-19?

Many patients with COVID-19 have developed pneumonia in both lungs. In some cases, death has occurred.

SITUATION IN HAWAII AND THE UNITED STATES

Are there any cases of COVID-19 in Hawaii? Have there been any deaths from COVID-19?

Yes. The latest numbers can be found at the HDOH website:
health.hawaii.gov/docd/advisories/novel-coronavirus-2019.

Am I at risk for COVID-19 in the United States?

This is a rapidly changing situation and the risk assessment may change daily. Tens of thousands of people are confirmed to have been infected across the country, with hundreds of deaths associated with COVID-19. CDC expects more cases to be identified in the coming days. The latest updates are available at CDC's [COVID-19 website](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/) and [HDOH's COVID-19 website](http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/advisories/novel-coronavirus-2019).

For the general public, the immediate risk to their health from COVID-19 is considered low, but as the outbreak expands, that risk will increase.

The following people are at increased risk:

- People in places where ongoing community spread is reported are at elevated risk of exposure.
- People who have traveled to places with ongoing community spread.
- Healthcare workers caring for people with COVID-19.
- Family members or close household contacts caring for people with COVID-19.

No matter what their risk is, everyone is advised to practice "social distancing" to protect themselves and others. Public health authorities such as CDC and HDOH want everyone to be prepared for the likelihood that COVID-19 will spread more widely in the United States.

Is COVID-19 a danger in Hawaii?

There have been dozens of cases of COVID-19 in Hawaii. So far, most cases have been travel-related. CDC has been notified and close contacts of the cases are being identified and informed of their exposure. Federal, state, and local officials in Hawaii recognize the seriousness of the situation and are working diligently with federal officials around the clock to prevent spread of COVID-19 within our state.

HDOH is urging all residents to prepare for the possibility that COVID-19 will spread in our communities. HDOH wants the public to know and practice important preventive measures, such as frequent handwashing, with soap and water for 20 seconds or with alcohol-based hand sanitizer, to prevent spread of COVID-19. A short HDOH video demonstrating proper hand-washing technique can be found at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2r2iqbEM5s.

Even if COVID-19 does not become widespread in Hawaii, our access to certain resources could still be impacted by this outbreak. Hawaii residents should make sure they and their household are prepared with a family emergency kit that lasts at least 14 days, in case a family member is quarantined or if there is a shortage of certain goods, such as medicine and food, in the event of a continuing pandemic. However, residents are reminded that hoarding goods may adversely affect other members of our island community. You can learn more about preparing a family emergency kit at health.hawaii.gov/prepare/protect-your-family.

HDOH is continually updating information as the situation evolves and federal guidance changes. We urge everyone to learn about COVID-19 by staying informed with credible sources, such as [CDC's](https://www.cdc.gov) and [HDOH's](https://www.hawaii.gov/hdoh) websites.

What happens if there is widespread person-to-person transmission in Hawaii or elsewhere in the United States?

While proactively carrying out prevention measures may slow the spread of COVID-19, it is important to be prepared for the possibility that it could still become widespread in Hawaii.

According to CDC, if there is widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the United States, there would be large numbers of people needing medical care at the same time, overwhelming hospitals and healthcare providers and public health, with elevated rates of hospitalizations and deaths. Other critical infrastructure, such as law enforcement, emergency medical services, and the transportation industry may also be affected.

At this time, there is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19 and no medications approved to treat it, so in order to prevent or reduce person-to-person transmission, Hawaii and other states have issued stay-at-home orders asking people to shelter in place for at least several weeks. (See **What measures are being done to prevent widespread transmission?** below.)

Does HDOH tell us where there is a confirmed case in Hawaii and where the case is located?

HDOH will inform the public whenever there is a confirmed case.

Does HDOH release the names of confirmed cases or persons under investigation?

HDOH protects the privacy of persons and their households and does not release names or other information that could be used to identify a person infected with COVID-19 or who is under quarantine. Only the county where the person is located is publicly identified.

At the same time, those who may have been exposed have a right to know and to protect themselves. When HDOH identifies a potential case of COVID-19, a detailed investigation is performed that includes tracing and contacting all close contacts of that person during the time that they were infectious. Since the virus is spread by prolonged close contact, people who have briefly been in the same indoor environment or had brief interactions are not considered to be at risk for infection.

When there are cases in Hawaii, how are they isolated? What are the procedures and protocols?

HDOH coordinates closely with Hawaii's healthcare facilities to ensure any clinic, hospital, or other healthcare setting is ready to care for a person infected or potentially infected with COVID-19 with appropriate isolation precautions. Cases not needing hospitalization will be subject to quarantine with close monitoring by public health and ready access to medical care.

What is self-monitoring?

People with travel history to areas where there is widespread community transmission but who have no symptoms of COVID-19 may be asked to stay home or in their hotel room and self-monitor for 14 days and check themselves for symptoms of COVID-19. If they develop a fever or cough, they should call their healthcare provider for guidance and tell them about their symptoms and travel history. Go to this website for a list of areas with widespread community transmission: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html.

What is HDOH doing to monitor the situation with COVID-19?

Vigilance and monitoring

- HDOH is actively working to detect potential cases of COVID-19 as early as possible by monitoring its disease surveillance systems to identify persons that require investigation and testing and are reviewing internal protocols to ensure proper management of cases.
- HDOH is working with its federal airport partners (U.S. Customs and Border Protections and CDC's Division of Global Migration and Quarantine) who are performing enhanced screening to identify travelers returning from China. Its disease investigation staff are actively monitoring these individuals with daily phone calls to record their temperature and confirm that they are avoiding contact with the public.
- HDOH is in constant communication with the CDC, public health partners in other jurisdictions, and local legislators and state officials to ensure Hawaii is aware of new developments in the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Over the past 15 years HDOH has been developing and refining its respiratory disease surveillance systems following CDC guidelines. This system includes sentinel influenza-like illness surveillance sites, virologic surveillance, pneumonia and influenza associated mortality, and cluster/outbreak investigations. HDOH is monitoring these systems on a daily basis looking for changes that might indicate the presence of COVID-19 clusters.

Preparation and Prevention

- HDOH is working with the medical community to issue Medical Advisories and Alerts and to ensure that hospitals and providers are following infection control recommendations and are prepared to detect and treat any patient with symptoms and travel history consistent with COVID-19.

- HDOH is communicating regularly with its local partners in the travel industry and schools to address their concerns and ensure the latest and most accurate guidance and information are being shared with their staff.

What are hospitals in Hawaii doing about COVID-19?

HDOH is sharing with and updating infection control guidance to healthcare facilities to ensure hospitals and healthcare providers are prepared should they encounter a person potentially infected with COVID-19. Hospitals and healthcare providers, in turn, are reviewing their infection control policies and stepping up their ability to handle COVID-19 cases. Hospitals and HDOH are in regular communication with federal partners to ensure supplies of personal protective equipment for healthcare workers are adequate.

PREVENTION AND PROTECTION

What measures are being done to prevent widespread transmission?

Across the country, many large events that attract multiple people, including sporting events, entertainment, and even state primaries, are being canceled or postponed. Events that are still happening are encouraged to practice social distancing (i.e., having people at least six feet apart). In many areas, including Hawaii, school is being temporarily canceled.

In mid- and late March, Governor David Ige issued several directives and a [stay-at-home order](#) to promote social distancing and control COVID-19 in Hawaii. They include the following:

- [Quarantining all travelers arriving in Hawaii](#), including state residents, for 14 days. (See [Is Hawaii quarantining travelers to our state?](#) below for more information.)
- Having only essential workers go to their jobs, while others work from home if possible.
- Social gatherings are limited to 10 people or less (per CDC guidelines).
- Bars and clubs will be closed.
- Restaurants will be closed except to provide food through drive-thru, take-out, or delivery.
- Theatres, entertainment centers, and visitor attractions will be closed.
- Residents are asked to avoid any non-essential travel.
- Services and activities at places of worship will be suspended.
- High-risk individuals are asked to stay home and take additional precautionary measures.
- People should not visit nursing homes, retirement facilities, or long-term care facilities.
- If someone in your household has tested positive for COVID-19, the entire household should stay home.
- Visitors are asked to postpone their vacations to Hawaii for at least 30 days.

These measures may be in place for many weeks. To learn more, visit the Governor's news page: governor.hawaii.gov/category/newsroom.

How can I protect myself and my family?

The best way to prevent transmission of any respiratory illness (including flu) is to follow everyday preventive actions:

- Get your flu shot. With current seasonal flu activity, it is likely there will be confusion as persons with flu will exhibit some of the same symptoms as COVID-19, such as fever and cough. We strongly recommend residents ages 6 months and older protect themselves against flu by receiving the seasonal flu vaccination.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue; then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Follow directions by state and local authorities, as well as HDOH and CDC.

Is there a vaccine for SARS-CoV-2 / COVID-19?

There is currently no vaccine to protect against this virus. The way to prevent infection is to practice preventive measures such as frequent handwashing.

Does the flu shot provide any protection against COVID-19?

The annual flu vaccination does *not* protect against COVID-19, but it is recommended for all persons ages 6 months or older to protect against getting influenza (the flu).

Why should I get the flu shot then?

Symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to symptoms of influenza (the flu). Reducing the number of flu cases (by getting the flu shot) not only helps decrease the burden on healthcare providers and facilities, having fewer patients with flu-like symptoms makes it easier to detect those persons who might have COVID-19 infection.

More importantly, the flu shot also prevents you from getting flu and spreading it to others, especially very young people, elderly people, and those with compromised immune systems. For these people, flu can be severe or even deadly.

Will wearing a mask protect me from COVID-19?

Whether you should wear a face mask depends on your situation:

- *If you are sick*, wearing a face mask can help prevent others from being infected by the droplets from your cough or sneeze.
- *For healthy or well people*, wearing a face mask is not recommended to prevent infection.
 - The best preventive measures are to wash your hands (especially before touching your face, nose, or mouth), cover your nose and mouth with your elbow or a tissue when coughing or sneezing, limit your contact with sick people, and stay home if sick.

TRAVEL-RELATED QUESTIONS

Is it safe to travel within the United States during the COVID-19 outbreak?

CDC maintains a list of things to consider before deciding to travel within the U.S.:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-in-the-us.html.

Is it safe to travel internationally?

On March 19, 2020, the U.S. Department of State issued a global level 4 travel advisory that covers all countries ([U.S. Department of State Global Health Advisory](#)) because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The State Department advises the following:

- U.S. citizens should avoid all international travel due to the global impact of COVID-19.
- In countries where commercial travel options are still available, U.S. citizens who live in the U.S. are advised to arrange for immediate return to the U.S. unless they are prepared to remain abroad for an indefinite period.
- United States citizens who live abroad should avoid all international travel.
 - Their travel may be disrupted and they could be forced to remain outside of the US for an indefinite time, as many countries are experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks and implementing travel restrictions and mandatory quarantines, closing borders, and prohibiting non-citizens from entry with little advance notice.

The situation with COVID-19 continues to evolve and we cannot predict if other countries will still be considered “safe” for travel in the coming months. Anyone with plans to travel internationally should stay informed of the latest [Traveler’s Health Recommendations](#) for their specific destination.

Is Hawaii quarantining travelers to our state?

On March 21, 2020, Governor Ige ordered a mandatory 14-day quarantine of all people traveling to Hawaii, including visitors and Hawaii residents, effective March 26. It states:

- If you are a resident, your designated quarantine location is your place of residence.
- If you are a visitor, your designated quarantine location is your hotel room or rented lodging.
- You can only leave your designated quarantine location for medical emergencies or to seek medical care.

Visitors and residents under quarantine should obey the following guidelines:

- Do not visit any public spaces, including restaurants, pools, meeting rooms, and fitness centers.
- Do not allow visitors in or out of our designated quarantine location other than authorized healthcare providers or individuals authorized by the Director of HIEMA to enter.

The news release of the Governor's mandatory 14-day quarantine order can be found here: [governor.hawaii.gov/newsroom/latest-news/governors-office-news-release-gov-ige-orders-mandatory-14-day-quarantine-for-all-individuals-arriving-or-returning-to-the-state-of-hawai'i](https://www.governor.hawaii.gov/newsroom/latest-news/governors-office-news-release-gov-ige-orders-mandatory-14-day-quarantine-for-all-individuals-arriving-or-returning-to-the-state-of-hawai'i)

OTHER QUESTIONS

Should I be worried about products imported from China?

There is no evidence you can become infected with COVID-19 from a product imported from China. COVID-19 appears to be related to coronaviruses like SARS and MERS which do not survive long on surfaces. Instead, they are usually spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets.

What about animal products from China?

CDC currently has no evidence that animals or animal products imported from China pose a risk for spreading COVID-19. Information will be updated as it becomes available.

Is my pet at risk of getting COVID-19? Do animals in Hawaii have COVID-19?

Although this coronavirus seems to have come from an animal source, it is now spreading from person-to-person. There is no reason to believe animals or pets in Hawaii or elsewhere in the United States might be at risk for infection from COVID-19.

If I think I or my family member has contracted COVID-19 but we have no health insurance due to a lost job or other situation, what should we do? Will we be turned away from a hospital?

Hospitals in Hawaii do not turn away emergency cases, regardless of insurance coverage. However, any individual or family that has lost health coverage due to job loss or other

circumstances is encouraged to contact federal and Hawaii state resources to obtain health insurance, such as the federal government’s healthcare marketplace or Hawaii’s Quest.

You can find out about your eligibility for free or subsidized healthcare coverage by visiting www.healthcare.gov/connect or humanservices.hawaii.gov/mqd or by calling Quest at 1-877-628-5076.

Where can I find out more information?

For more information about COVID-19, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/novel-coronavirus-2019.html>. You can also visit HDOH’s COVID-19 websites at hawaiiicovid19.com and health.hawaii.gov/covid19.

Finally, you can contact HDOH’s partners at Aloha United Way from anywhere in Hawaii for information and referral services:

- Call 2-1-1.
- Text 877-275-6569 (include your zip code)
- Chat at www.auw211.org.
- Email info211@auw.org.

