

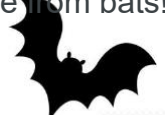


COVID-19: Stay Safe!!!



What is COVID-19?

It is the medical illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2.) You'll also hear it called the novel coronavirus. We think it originally came from bats!



How do you get it?

The virus is usually spread by respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or even talks! These droplets can cause infection if they are inhaled directly or if you touch a surface with virus on it and then touch your face. The virus is also found in feces and urine.



What are the symptoms?

This is where it gets tricky. About half of the people with it have no symptoms at all, even though they can transmit it to others. Otherwise, common symptoms are fever, cough, and flu-like symptoms like muscle aches and fatigue.



Is it dangerous?

Usually not, but it can be. Although most people who get it recover without problems, about 10-20% develop complications that require hospitalization. Usually this is due to lung problems, but the coronavirus can also attack other organs and cause permanent damage. About 1 in 100 or so will die. People who are older, obese, or have pre-existing heart and lung problems are at increased risk for death, but for reasons we still don't understand, the virus also occasionally kills children and younger persons without known risk factors.



How do you test for it?

There are 2 kinds of tests. The first is used when you are actively sick. It detects the virus's genetic material and is usually a swab up the nose! If it is positive, it means you are infected and can transmit the virus to others. The other test is a blood test. It looks for coronavirus antibodies; if it is positive it means you were infected in the past. It takes a number of weeks after infection for this test to become positive, and we don't know yet how long the antibodies will stay around.



Is there a treatment?

At this point, treatment mostly consists of supportive care to keep oxygen levels up. We don't yet have any medications that are curative but a couple have been shown to help. One called remdesivir helps reduce the amount of time you are hospitalized, and a steroid called dexamethasone improves survival in people who have developed more severe illness. Obviously, this is a very active area of research.



When will there be a vaccine?

Hopefully soon! If we are very fortunate, there might be a vaccine available by the end of 2020, but more likely it won't be available until at least 2021. We also don't know yet how effective the vaccine will be, but again, this is a very active area of medical research.

