



Medicine for Managers

Dr Paul Lambden BSc MB BS BDS FDSRCS MRCS LRCP DRCOG MHSM

Coronavirus

Coronavirus occurs commonly in nature and, in general terms, is one of the viruses that cause upper respiratory symptoms including coughing, sneezing, runny nose, and sore throat, together with more general symptoms of fever, headache and feeling unwell. Most such infections last a few days and are not serious.

There are four common coronaviruses which cause such mild or moderate symptoms. They are named 229E, NL63, OC43, and HKU1

However, some types of coronavirus are more serious because they may be more virulent and by the symptoms and signs that they produce. Three such viruses have been recognised:

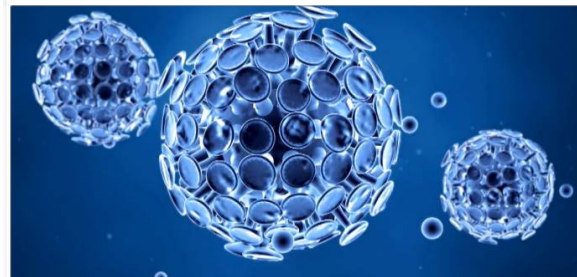
Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

Coronavirus (SARS-CoV) was recognised in China in late 2002 and led to a worldwide outbreak with over 8,000 probable cases and nearly 800 recorded deaths. No further cases have been reported since 2004.

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

Coronavirus (MERS CoV) was first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012. There was a large outbreak in Korea in 2015.

2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), sometimes called the **Wuhan Virus** was identified by the World Health Organisation in China. The latest figures suggest that there have been over 7,000 reported cases and 200 deaths but the data will probably be hopelessly out-of-date by the time of publication.



What is coronavirus?

Well, we know it is a virus and it was first identified during the mid-1960s.

The name was derived from the rather fanciful crown-like shape.

Some coronaviruses that infect animals can transmute to infect humans but the origin of many is not known.

It has been suggested that the latest outbreak may have been passed to humans through bats or snakes.

Like other respiratory viruses, they can be spread, not only by coughing and sneezing, but also by touching the hands or face of an infected person, or by touching a doorknob handled by them, and then touching their own mouth or nose.

Most people will have had a coronavirus, probably as a child. It can occur at any time but is more common in winter. One strain of virus does not normally give any immunity to other strains.

Why are some forms more serious?

The SARS and the MERS viruses (and now the current coronavirus) have been or are more serious, partly because the upper respiratory symptoms that they produce can be more severe and also because the infection can spread to infect the lower part of the respiratory system with the result that the patient develops pneumonia.

Control and Prevention of the Wuhan virus

The control of the Wuhan virus would have been reasonably easy at the beginning of 2020, but to do so required full openness and recognition and rapid action.

There is no vaccine to control the infection and it is spreading throughout China. Given the potential seriousness, it is not surprising that the Chinese authorities responded,

when they did, by quarantining whole cities with millions of people.

Protection is simple and, if precautions become required because infection is spreading, simple measures can be effective:

1. **Wear gloves** when outside. Keep them on in trains, buses, underground and any public places where you may hold handles etc.
2. **If you are indoors**, particularly at work, and not wearing gloves, for example when shaking hands, using door handles or dining, do not touch your face under any circumstances. Before putting your gloves on to go outside, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water, taking care to ensure that every part of the hands are cleaned.
3. **Change gloves daily**. Wash thoroughly. Do not wear them if damp.
4. **When outside, masks may be helpful** but should be changed frequently and not allowed to become damp with saliva. Damp masks may become porous.
5. **Avoid crowds**. Keep two feet away from individuals. If they are coughing keep 3-4 feet away or leave them. Avoid shaking hands or hugging people.
6. **When there is risk** of catching infection in your home, have your own individual towels. Wash them regularly.



7. **In any building**, at home or outside, infections are spread through doorknobs, stair banisters, desk tops, mobile telephones, computer keyboards, etc. Be careful what is touched and where possible use gloves. Do not touch your face and wash your hands after touching knobs or office equipment, etc.

Managing a coronavirus infection

A coronavirus is treated in exactly the same way as any upper respiratory virus infection.

1. Plentiful rest
2. Drink plenty of fluids
3. Use symptomatic treatments for headache, fever and sore throat; paracetamol or ibuprofen

Older people and those with other chronic illnesses, particularly heart and lung diseases, are more susceptible to the complications of a viral infection.

If the symptoms are becoming more severe and the individual is showing such signs as high fever, breathlessness or severe malaise, medical assistance should be sought.

There is currently no vaccine available for human coronavirus infection.

The more optimistic predictions are that a vaccine could be ready for trials by July of this year.

paullambden@compuserve.com