

What you need to know about coronavirus

28 January 2020, by Laura Rossacher



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The latest strain of coronavirus, a respiratory illness associated with the common cold and pneumonia, has recently spread from China to the United States and Europe. As of Jan. 26, five travel-related cases in the United States have been confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The World Health Organization estimates that more than 1,320 cases of the new coronavirus have occurred globally thus far.

Gonzalo Bearman, M.D., chair of the Division of Infectious Diseases at Virginia Commonwealth University and associate hospital epidemiologist at VCU Health, has been following the spread of the coronavirus. He has experience monitoring the spread of new diseases, such as the Zika virus in 2016.

Bearman, a professor in the School of Medicine's Department of Internal Medicine, recently answered questions about this new virus and the Unique Pathogens Unit at VCU Medical Center.

What is the difference between a common cold and the new coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are types of viruses that cause things like the common cold. A common cold, however, is much more limited in severity and duration. The symptoms, like congestion, [sore throat](#) and other upper respiratory tract symptoms do not involve the lungs and the lower respiratory tract. The new coronavirus can have more [severe symptoms](#) such as high fever, shortness of breath and pneumonia.

If you were sick, how would you know if it is the coronavirus or something else, like the flu?

The risk for a novel coronavirus infection here in the United States is exceedingly low. The first thing we look at is if you have traveled to an area of epidemic activity, such as China, or if you have been in contact with someone within the past 14 days who has a confirmed case of coronavirus. For us to be concerned, you would have had to be exposed to a confirmed case of the novel coronavirus and present symptoms like shortness of breath, a worsening cough, sore muscles and joint pain.

Who sets the protocols for testing and treating the virus?

The protocols for the assessment, evaluation, diagnostic testing and treatment of the novel coronavirus are really set forth by national and international health authorities, such as the WHO and the CDC. Institutions like VCU Health stay alert and on top of these recommendations, and work closely with the local [health](#) department and the CDC. Any samples for testing go directly to the CDC, and results are typically available within 48 to 72 hours.

Provided by Virginia Commonwealth University

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