What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infection caused by a specific virus called SARS-CoV-2 discovered at the end of 2019 as the cause of a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China. It is spread mainly when a person with the infection coughs or sneezes and these droplets are transmitted to another person’s mouth, nose or eyes. Someone can also become infected by touching an infected surface and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth. Anyone at any age can be infected, although adults of middle age and older are most commonly affected.

What COVID-19 symptoms should I look for and what should I do if I have them?

The symptoms of COVID-19 are usually fever, cough and shortness of breath.

In addition to the classic trio of COVID-19 symptoms, you may also experience body aches, fatigue, a runny nose, a sore throat, a loss of your sense of smell or taste, headaches or gastrointestinal issues such as diarrhea. These other less common symptoms can be confused with the symptoms of a cold, flu or seasonal allergies. The main way to tell the difference between COVID-19 and these other conditions is if your symptoms worsen or don’t improve after about a week.

If you are concerned you have been exposed to COVID-19 or are having symptoms, please call your primary care provider to get instructions and follow these guidelines:

Stay home except to get medical care

As advised by the CDC, we recommend you stay in your home and separate yourself from other people at home to avoid spreading this infection. The elderly or anyone with more serious medical issues may get more severe symptoms. We recommend this separation until you have been symptom-free for 72 hours. If your symptoms worsen—specifically difficulty breathing, chest pressure or pain, unable to keep fluids down, severe vomiting, diarrhea or weakness—you may need to return to the Emergency Department for evaluation.

You should restrict activities outside your home, except for getting medical care. Do not go to work, school or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing or taxis. This is for the health and safety of others around you.

Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home

People: You should stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home. Use a separate bathroom, if available.

Animals: Do not handle pets or other animals while sick. For more information on animals/pets, please visit cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#animals

Continued on page 2
Don’t share household items
You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, utensils, towels or bedding with other people in your home. After using these items, wash thoroughly with soap and water.

Clean all “high-touch” surfaces every day
High-touch surfaces include counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables. Clean any surfaces that may have blood, stool, or body fluids on them. Use a household cleaning spray or wipe, according to the label instructions.

Monitor your symptoms
Seek prompt medical attention if your illness is worsening (e.g., difficulty breathing).

What happens if I’m so sick I can’t manage my care at home?
If you are having an emergency, such as shortness of breath, please go to your nearest Emergency Department. Put on a facemask before you enter the facility. These steps will help keep other people from getting exposed. If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that you have, or may have, COVID-19. If possible, put on a facemask before emergency medical services arrive.

What should I expect from my ER care team?
If you have COVID-19 and need emergency treatment, your care team will wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE). This will include a gown, gloves, mask, and sometimes a special respirator to protect against virus in the air. Your care team may run lab tests and x-rays to learn how severe your illness is. If your illness is severe, you may be admitted to the critical care unit (CCU) and/or may need a breathing tube.

Why do some people with this illness need a breathing tube?
COVID-19 can cause pneumonia which can lead to acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). Because ARDS causes the lungs to fill with fluid, most patients require a breathing tube (endotracheal tube) to support their breathing. The critical care unit does several tests every day to decide when patients are ready to have the endotracheal tube removed. Once removed, patients may stay in the critical care unit for observation and then may be moved to a medical unit.