

Novel coronavirus: key questions and answers on the outbreak

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Clinicians around the globe are currently focused on the emergence and spread of the novel coronavirus and infection it causes, now also known as COVID-19. Here are some summarised questions and answers about coronavirus, based on information published by Public Health England and the World Health Organization.

What is the novel coronavirus?

A new strain of coronavirus, called SARS coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), was first identified in Wuhan City, China, at the end of last year. COVID-19 is the name of the infection caused by SARS-CoV-2 and stands for Corona Virus Disease 2019.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses with some causing less-severe diseases such as the common cold, and others causing more severe disease such as Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The novel coronavirus is a member of the coronavirus family.

What are some of the key events during the outbreak so far?

- On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization was informed of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Hubei Province.
- On 12 January 2020, it was announced that a novel coronavirus – SARS-CoV-2 – had been subsequently identified from patient samples.
- On 30 January 2020, the WHO declared the outbreak a “public health emergency of international concern”.
- On 31 February 2020, a group of 83 repatriated UK nationals in self-isolation arrived from Wuhan at Wirral University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, where they were quarantined at Arrowe Park Hospital.
- On 2 February 2020, a UK-wide public information campaign has been launched to advise the public on how to slow the spread of coronavirus and reduce the impact on NHS services.
- On 12 February 2020, so-called coronavirus super-spreader Steve Walsh was discharged from Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust and made a full recovery.
- On 13 February 2020, the first group of 83 UK citizens left the accommodation block at Arrowe Park Hospital, shortly followed by a second group.
- On 18 February 2020, 72,436 cases and 1,868 fatalities had been officially reported by the Chinese National Health Commission from Wuhan, China. In addition, 897 cases had been diagnosed in 28 other countries or areas. Five fatalities outside of China had been reported.
- On 18 February 2020, a total of 4,916 people had been tested for novel coronavirus in the UK, of which 4,907 were confirmed negative and 9 were positive.

Where did the novel coronavirus originate?

The source of the outbreak has yet to be determined, according to Public Health England (PHE), though bats, snakes and the endangered pangolin have all been speculated on in the media.

Preliminary investigations identified environmental samples positive for SARS-CoV-2 in Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan City.

However, some laboratory-confirmed patients did not report visiting this market, so the zoonotic source to the outbreak has not been identified yet, but investigations are ongoing.

How does novel coronavirus present?

Novel coronavirus presents with flu-like symptoms including a fever, a cough, and difficulty breathing. The current evidence is that most cases appear to be mild, although some severe cases are also being reported, of which some require intensive care. Those who have died in Wuhan appear to have had pre-existing health conditions.

According to PHE, a variety of abnormalities may be expected on chest radiographs, but bilateral lung infiltrates appear to be common – similar to what is seen in other types of viral pneumonia.

How should nurses respond to a suspected case?

Health professionals who are contacted by a patient with symptoms following their return to Wuhan have been advised to submit samples to Public Health England for testing. Individuals should be treated in isolation.

When a clinician suspects novel coronavirus, they should take samples from the nose, throat and deeper respiratory samples, package and send them safely.

facility in Colindale, North London, or subsequently one of 12 other laboratories across the UK. PHE Colindale will then carry out all confirmation tests.

All acute trusts have also been told to establish priority assessment pods near to their accident and emergency departments. They are for people to contact for assessment of coronavirus. Only if NHS 111 deems it necessary, should staff test people in the pod.

How is novel coronavirus being treated?

In the absence of effective drugs or a vaccine, PHE said control of this virus relies on the prompt identification, appropriate risk assessment, management and isolation of possible and confirmed cases, and the investigation and follow up of close contacts to minimise potential onward transmission.

Should nurses wear a mask to protect themselves?

Wearing a medical mask can help limit the spread of some respiratory diseases. However, WHO highlighted that using a mask alone was not guaranteed to prevent infections and should be combined with other prevention measures including hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene and avoiding close contact – at least 1m (3ft) distance between yourself and other people.

How long does the virus survive on surfaces?

According to the WHO, as of 18 February, it was still not known how long the nCoV virus survives on surfaces, although preliminary information suggests it may survive a few hours or more. Simple disinfectants can kill the virus, making it no longer possible to infect people.

Where can I find out more detailed information and guidance?

- [Public Health England guidance for health professionals](#)
- [World Health Organization information and guidance](#)
- [US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention outbreak monitoring](#)
- [Nursing Times coronavirus section for news updates](#)

How has Nursing Times reported on coronavirus so far?

- [WHO leader praises nurses caring for babies in coronavirus isolation](#)
- [Fake news on coronavirus could make disease outbreak worse](#)
- [‘No evidence’ coronavirus can be passed to child late in pregnancy](#)
- [Novel coronavirus officially named to prevent ‘stigmatisation’](#)
- [UK races to secure nurse PPE for coronavirus as global supplies run low](#)
- [Third UK case of coronavirus confirmed](#)
- [UK pledges £20m to support race to develop coronavirus vaccine](#)
- [Nurse leaders offer reassurance as coronavirus hits UK](#)
- [Nursing expert urges ‘perspective’ as concern grows over coronavirus](#)
- [UK ‘well prepared’ to stave off spread of new coronavirus strain](#)