

TIP SHEET: ABOUT CORONAVIRUSES

COMMON CORONAVIRUSES

Common human coronaviruses, including types 229E, NL63, OC43, and HKU1, usually cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory tract illnesses, like the common cold. Most people get infected with these viruses at some point in their lives. These illnesses usually only last for a short amount of time. Symptoms may include:

- Runny nose
- Headache
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Fever
- A general feeling of being unwell

Human coronaviruses can sometimes cause lower-respiratory tract illnesses, such as pneumonia or bronchitis. This is more common in people with cardiopulmonary disease, people with weakened immune systems, infants, and older adults.

OTHER HUMAN CORONAVIRUSES

Two other human coronaviruses, MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV, have been known to frequently cause severe symptoms. MERS symptoms usually include fever, cough, and shortness of breath, which often progress to pneumonia. About three or four out of every 10 patients reported with MERS have died. MERS cases continue to occur, primarily in the Arabian Peninsula. SARS symptoms often included fever, chills, and body aches, which usually progressed to pneumonia. No human cases of SARS have been reported anywhere in the world since 2004.

The newest strain includes the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), which originated in China in December 2019. The novel coronavirus outbreak is ongoing, and health authorities are actively monitoring it in order to learn more.

DIAGNOSING A CORONAVIRUS

Your health care provider may order laboratory tests on respiratory specimens and serum (part of your blood) to detect human coronaviruses. Laboratory testing is more likely to be used if you have severe disease or are suspected of having MERS.

If you are experiencing symptoms, you should tell your health care provider about any recent travel or contact with animals. Most MERS-CoV infections have been reported from countries in the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, reporting a travel history or contact with camels or camel products is very important when trying to diagnose MERS.

TIP SHEET: ABOUT CORONAVIRUSES

HOW CORONAVIRUSES TRANSMIT

Human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to others through:

- The air by coughing and sneezing
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands
- Rarely, fecal contamination

In the United States, people usually get infected with common human coronaviruses in the fall and winter. However, you can get infected at any time of the year. Most people will get infected with one or more of the common human coronaviruses in their lifetime. Young children are most likely to get infected. However, people can have multiple infections in their lifetime.

SOURCE: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases. (Reviewed 2019, August 6). About coronaviruses. Retrieved January 27, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov>