

Masks may stop infected patients spreading the virus. Coronavirus sufferers should 'self isolate' by staying indoors as much as possible. (Getty Images)

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The [coronavirus](#) outbreak is making headlines all over the world.

News of rising numbers of patients and deaths is leaving many people anxious that they may also catch the infection.

To help the public stay up-to-date on all they need to know, Yahoo UK has answered the most common [coronavirus](#) questions.

What is the coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are not new, but the ongoing outbreak is a new strain.

Strains are generally defined as subtype of a particular virus or bacteria, and other coronavirus strains can cause the common cold.

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (Sars) is also a coronavirus. It killed 774 people during its 2002/3 outbreak.

[See latest coronavirus news and updates](#)

Another is Middle East respiratory syndrome (Mers), which killed 858 people in 2012.

The new strain – called Covid-19 – is thought to have come from a seafood and live animal market in the Chinese city of Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, at the end of 2019.

The market sold a range of dead and live animals, including chickens, hedgehogs, snakes and donkeys.

Most of those who initially became ill worked at, or visited, the market.

Close contact with animals may have caused Covid-19 to “jump” into humans.

Some scientists believe the strain may have started in bats, before “jumping” into snakes or scaly anteater pangolins, before infecting humans.

What are the symptoms?

Four out of five people who catch the [coronavirus](#) have mild symptoms.

These include fever, cough, fatigue and slight breathlessness.

Some have also complained of a runny or stuffy nose, as well as sneezing and a sore throat.

Others develop diarrhoea and aches and pains.

Headaches, nausea and vomiting are not common symptoms.

In severe cases, patients develop pneumonia.

This occurs when an infection of the airways spreads to the air sacs in the lungs, causing them to become inflamed and filled with fluid or pus.











Breathlessness is a common symptom of pneumonia, with some patients requiring hospital care.

How do the symptoms compare to cold and flu?

Covid-19 has come about during the UK's cold and flu season.

This may cause some who get the sniffles to worry they have the coronavirus.

The chart below shows how the similarities and differences between the symptoms of colds, flu and the coronavirus.

Symptom	Cold	Flu	Coronavirus
 Fever	Common	Common	Common
 Fatigue	Uncommon	Common	Common
 Cough	Common	Common	Common
 Sneezing	Common	No	Sometimes
 Aches & pains	Common	Common	Sometimes
 Runny/stuffy nose	Common	Common	Sometimes
 Sore throat	Common	Common	Sometimes
 Diarrhoea	No	Sometimes	Sometimes
 Headaches	Common	Common	Uncommon
 Short of breath	No	No	Common

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Coronavirus shares some, but not all, symptoms with cold and flu. (Yahoo UK)

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All three conditions cause fever and cough. Unlike Covid-19, however, colds and flu do not make patients short of breath.

Fatigue is a common symptom for flu and the coronavirus, but not colds.

The coronavirus can spread by sneezing, but it is an uncommon symptom.

Sneezing often occurs with colds, but not flu.

The coronavirus sometimes causes aches and pains, as well as a runny or stuffed nose and sore throat – all symptoms that are common with colds and flu.

Diarrhoea does not occur with colds, but can sometimes come about with flu and the coronavirus.

Headaches are common with both colds and flu, but not Covid-19.

What should I do if I think I have the coronavirus?

People who have coronavirus-like symptoms, who have been to an area with a high number of patients or who have recently spent time with a coronavirus sufferer may worry they have caught the infection.

[John Hopkins University lists](#) the countries with the highest number of cases.

Officials urge these people stay at home.

They should avoid public areas, like work and school, and stop using public transport.

People who live with others should stay in a different room and use their own bathroom, if possible.

They should also avoid pets and other animals.

Patients may need to see a doctor but should call ahead, letting them know they could have the coronavirus.

The medic can then take steps to prevent others catching the infection.

Patients should not go to their local pharmacy and instead call the [non-emergency NHS number 111](#) for advice.

If they have to be around others, patients should wear a mask.

Some find masks make breathing difficult. In this case, the people around the patient should wear masks when in the same room.

Patients should cough or sneeze into a tissue that then immediately gets thrown away.

Washing hands regularly with soap and water, or a sanitiser with at least 60% alcohol, is important to protect others from infection.

Hands should be washed for around 20 seconds, or the time it takes to sing *Happy Birthday* twice.

Do this after sneezing or coughing, before preparing or eating food and after using the toilet.

It is also important not to share dishes, drinking glasses, cutlery, towels or bedding.

Surfaces that are touched often – kitchen counters, doorknobs, phones and keyboards – should be disinfected regularly with a household cleaner.

Patients should keep in touch with their doctor, letting them know if they feel worse.

Doctors should tell the patient when it is safe for them to be around others again.

A health worker in a mask and protective suit waits to take passengers' temperature at the German-Polish border in Swiecko, Poland, on 11 March. (Getty Images)

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What is the latest government advice?

The government is advising people to avoid infection by following the above instructions, particularly when it comes to hand-washing and staying at home.

For those hoping to go abroad, check the [Foreign Office website](#) for advice on “high-risk areas” like China, Italy and South Korea.

Certain travellers should “self-isolate” by staying indoors when they arrive back in the UK, even if they do not have symptoms.

These include those who returned from anywhere in Italy after 9 March.

People returning from Iran or Hubei, or from Daegu, Cheongdo or Gyeongsan in South Korea, over the past 14 days should also keep to themselves.

[Those showing symptoms and returning from Cambodia, Hong Kong or Japan – to name a few –](#) in the past two weeks should also self isolate.

[The Foreign Office has issued a travel update for Britons in Italy](#), urging remaining tourists to contact their airline to arrange a return to the UK.

For everyone else, keep up-to-date on vaccinations to reduce the strain on the NHS. Note that there is no jab for the coronavirus.

Most people who are becoming seriously ill with Covid-19 are elderly or already have an illness, like asthma or diabetes.

If you know a vulnerable person, call them to check how they are feeling.

Where can I get more information?

People who suspect they may have coronavirus, or hope they have overcome it, should call NHS 111 for advice.

When it comes to travelling, [the UK government has specified countries and areas where the risk is high](#). It has also issued [travel advice](#).

[The NHS has more information on how the virus spreads](#), mainly via cough and sneezes.

Britons can also learn [how the government plans to tackle the virus in its action plan](#).