

Exclusively for Dental Health Services Participating Dentists and Their Staff

Coronavirus

What you need to know

Much is unknown about how 2019-nCoV, the new coronavirus, spreads. Current knowledge is largely based on what is known about similar coronaviruses. Most often, spread from person-to-person happens among close contacts (about 6 feet). Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It's currently unclear if a person can get 2019-nCoV by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. Typically, with most respiratory viruses, people are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest). It's important to note that how easily a virus spreads person-to-person can vary. Some viruses are highly contagious (like measles), while other viruses are less so. There is much more to learn about the transmissibility, severity, and other features associated with 2019-nCoV, and investigations are ongoing.

How Can You Protect Yourself and Your Patients?

WHO offers a downloadable PDF: [Infection prevention and control during health care when novel coronavirus \(nCoV\) infection is suspected](#), which is adapted from similar recommendations for past SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV outbreaks, combined with current knowledge of the nCoV situation in China and other countries.

WHO urges that the following respiratory hygiene measures be used:

- Ensure that all patients cover their nose and mouth with a tissue or elbow when coughing or sneezing
- Offer a medical mask to patients with suspected 2019-nCoV infection while they are in waiting/public areas or in cohorting rooms
- Perform hand hygiene after contact with respiratory secretions. HCWs should apply the WHO's My 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene approach before touching a patient, before any clean or aseptic procedure is performed, after exposure to body fluid, after touching a patient, and after touching a patient's surroundings.
- Hand hygiene includes either cleansing hands with an alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) or with soap and water
- Alcohol-based hand rubs are preferred if hands are not visibly soiled
- Wash hands with soap and water when they are visibly soiled

The recommendation is for patients suspected of infection to wear masks, which help trap virus-infected particles, such as droplets, mitigating potential exposure of healthy individuals to the disease. More specialized masks, such as an N95 respirator, may provide healthcare professionals with increased protection. However, due to the small number of cases in the U.S., the CDC does not currently recommend the use of a mask or respirator (as of the writing of this article). It is important to point out that the N95 masks require training for proper use and make breathing very difficult.

WHO details a variety of additional precautionary measures, triage, early recognition and source control, such as, "Use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) according to risk assessment, injection safety practices, safe waste management, proper linens, environmental cleaning and sterilization of patient-care equipment."

[The Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) has created a landing page, Information for Public Health Professionals, with useful information.](#)