Coronavirus information

What is the coronavirus?

The coronavirus – also called SARS-CoV-2 – is a virus that first occurred in December 2019 in a market in the Chinese city of Wuhan. It can be transmitted from one human being to another by droplets. These droplets form, for example, when speaking, coughing or sneezing. SARS-CoV-2 is now found all over the world. The illness it causes is called COVID-19. It can take different forms and be more or less severe. Depending on disease progression, COVID-19 can appear like a common cold, but also includes dangerous forms of pneumonia. The term 'corona' is a Latin word for a wreath or a crown.
It is based on the appearance of the virus, which resembles a wreath.

How do you catch coronavirus?

The virus is passed from person to person. This happens, for example, when coughing, speaking or shaking hands with someone.

How can you tell if you have the virus?

If you have the coronavirus, you might get a cough, sore throat, runny nose, headache, sore joints or a fever above 38°C. The symptoms are very similar to flu. Many people temporarily lose part or all of their sense of smell and taste. Some people also get diarrhoea and suffer from stomach pain or nausea. Breathing difficulties, bronchitis or pneumonia can also be symptoms of coronavirus infection.

In most cases, the first symptoms appear five to six days after infection. But it can also take up to 14 days before a person develops signs of illness.

If you have symptoms, call your doctor's practice. Your doctor will then decide whether you need to be tested for coronavirus. If you can't reach your doctor's practice, please contact the on-call medical service on 116 117. If you are showing signs of coronavirus infection, you should stay at home and avoid contact with other people.

Why is the coronavirus dangerous?

For most people, the illness caused by the coronavirus is mild. However, according to the Robert-Koch-Institute, around 20 percent of those affected experience severe illness. Severe illness means that symptoms often get worse after seven to ten days, and those affected develop breathing difficulites or pneumonia. So far, mainly older people and people who were already sick have died from the virus.

What do I have to do if I show signs of illness?

If you have a fever, cough, or shortness of breath, you should call a doctor and make an appointment. Your doctor will also decide whether you need to be tested for coronavirus. Outside of practice opening hours, you can contact the medical on-call service by dialling the Germany-wide number 116 117. Refrain from contact with other people and keep a distance of at least 1.5 to 2 meters from others. Stay at home or in your room.
Cough and sneeze into the crook of your arm, or into a tissue, which you then immediately dispose of in a rubbish bin. Wash your hands often and thoroughly. You can find guidance on what to do when affected by COVID-19 in publications by the Robert-Koch-Institute.

What do I have to do if I've been in contact with an infected person?

If you had personal contact with a person who has the coronavirus, go home and immediately call your local public health authority (Gesundheitsamt), no matter whether you are having symptoms or not. After asking you some questions, the public health authority can recommend measures you can take in your particular situation, and decide on any necessary further steps.

The line may be busy if lots of people are calling at the same time. In this case, please call the Federal Ministry of Health (Bundesministerium für Gesundheit) on 030 346 465 100. Advice on this line is only available in German.

If you live in a reception centre or shared accommodation facility, immediately inform management or social services. Also inform your school, language school, the place where you are being trained or work etc.