

Questions about the situation in the Netherlands

Are you on holiday in Italy or have you just returned and have concerns about the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

In Northern Italy, the coronavirus is spreading in some municipalities: Codogno e dintorni, Sesto Cremonese, Pizzighettone, Soresina, Sesto SG, Pieve Porto Morone (province of Lombardy) and Vó Euganeo, Mira (province of Veneto). Italy is in the process of mapping all contacts around the patients. The chance that you have had contact with one of these patients is very small. It only makes sense to have yourself tested if you have health problems and have been in one of these municipalities. If that is the case, contact your GP by telephone when:

- You have a fever with respiratory symptoms (coughing or shortness of breath).

People who have a cold or respiratory symptoms in the Netherlands do not have to worry about having the novel coronavirus. At this moment, the novel coronavirus has not yet been diagnosed in the Netherlands. It is much more likely that people have the flu or another cold virus. Furthermore, the earlier advice still applies to contact your family doctor **by phone** if you have a fever with respiratory symptoms, and if you:

- have been on mainland China, in Taiwan, Macao, Hong Kong, Singapore, Iran or the municipalities mentioned above in Northern Italy, for the past two weeks.
- or have been in contact with a patient with the novel coronavirus in the last two weeks

For current travel advice, please visit the website of the [Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) situation updates for Europe, can be found on the [website of the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, ECDC](#).

How is the Netherlands preparing for a possible coronavirus outbreak?

The novel coronavirus may also emerge in the Netherlands via travellers. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that this is noticed as soon as possible and that we ensure that the virus cannot spread. The Netherlands has a structure in place in which doctors, laboratories and Municipal Public Health Service (GGD) all work together to combat various outbreaks of infectious diseases. Multiple actions have been taken within this collaboration:

- The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM National Institute for Public Health and the Environment) and Erasmus University Medical Center, Erasmus MC are informed about the outbreak via various international bodies
- RIVM informs doctors, GGD's and microbiological laboratories about the latest developments and what to do if someone is infected with the novel coronavirus
- Erasmus MC and RIVM have good laboratory tests at their disposal to identify the virus
- The novel coronavirus is a notifiable disease group A. All doctors and laboratories have to report each patient with a suspicion of novel coronavirus infection to RIVM.

Why are there no checks at Dutch airports?

At present, that is not an appropriate measure for the Netherlands. If travellers at Dutch airports were to be checked currently for fever, this would mostly identify people with the flu or a cold.

What happens if there is someone who might be infected with the new coronavirus (COVID-19)?

If someone reports to a physician with symptoms and the physician thinks that the patient may have the new coronavirus, a protocol is put into action. The physician asks for a test at the RIVM (The Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment) and the Erasmus University Medical Center. Both laboratories start testing simultaneously. Meanwhile, the suspect patient is kept in isolation, either at home or at the hospital. That depends on the situation. If the test comes back positive, the patient remains in isolation and the Municipal Health Service (GGD) carries out a so-called contact investigation. All people with whom the patient has been in contact during the infectious period must monitor their health during the incubation period. If they develop symptoms of the disease, they must report this to the GGD. The whole process then starts again from the beginning.

How reliable is the test we use?

In the Netherlands, two laboratories have been using the test for several weeks now. These are renowned laboratories with a lot of experience in similar tests. If a patient tests positive for the coronavirus, the test will be repeated at the other laboratory.

Should we be taking more measures to combat the virus in the Netherlands?

Behind the scenes, a lot of work is being done to identify and care for potential patients in the Netherlands. We do recognise that the disease is serious and contagious. We are preparing for a serious scenario, in case the situation proves more serious than was previously expected. At the moment, it is of little use to check all people entering the country for signs of fever, for instance. We would mostly detect people with flu and the common cold.

Questions about Personal Health

I am sick. Could that be the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Most patients with this virus are from Wuhan or have travelled to Wuhan recently. People who have a cold or lung problems in the Netherlands do not have to worry about having the novel coronavirus. Certainly not if they have not been to the mainland of China, apart from Taiwan, Macau and Hongkong recently. It is much more likely that people have the flu or another cold virus.

When should I contact my GP by telephone?

People can phone their GP if they:

- Have a fever and respiratory symptoms (such as cough, shortness of breath or pneumonia)
- Have been on the mainland of China, apart from Taiwan, Macau and Hongkong within the last 14 days
- Have had contact within the last 14 days with a patient infected by the novel coronavirus

The GP consults with the Municipal Public Health Service (GGD) if it is necessary to be examined for the novel coronavirus.

Can I sign up for a test/to be tested?

It only makes sense for you to be tested if you display symptoms. If so, please contact your general practitioner by telephone.

Questions about preventing contamination

What can I do to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

The most important measures people can take to prevent the spread of the coronavirus are straightforward. These measures apply to all viruses that can cause flu and colds. It is always important to follow up these basic hygiene measures:

They are:

- Wash your hands regularly
- Cough and sneeze on the inside of your elbow
- Use paper handkerchiefs

I want to visit/organise an event. Do I need to take precautions?

It is important to follow the standard measures that apply to all viruses that can cause flu and colds:

- Wash your hands regularly
- Cough and sneeze on the inside of your elbow
- Use paper handkerchiefs

Does it make sense to wear face masks to protect yourself against the new coronavirus (COVID-19)?

In the Netherlands, we only recommend face masks for medical personnel. The problem is that it only helps if you use special masks that close very well over your nose and mouth. You need to use the masks very precisely and change them regularly. This is almost impossible in daily use.

Can you become infected if you order a package from China?

Coronaviruses spread through humans and animals. They cannot survive well outside the body, certainly not on cardboard, packaging material or other items. Other coronaviruses do not spread in this way and we have no reason to believe that it is any different for this new coronavirus (COVID-19).

Can the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) also spread through the air?

Coughing and sneezing causes the virus to come out through the nose, throat or lungs. The virus gets into the air in small droplets. These droplets do not float in the air but descend quickly. The sicker a person is, the more virus they can spread. So far, there is no evidence that the virus can stay airborne for a long time and spread in this manner.

Questions about the novel coronavirus

Is the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) more severe than the regular flu?

At this point, we do not know how severe COVID-19 is. The official numbers at this moment are not alarming. However, we do not know precisely how much delay there is in receiving the data and whether there is underreporting and how big it is.

COVID-19 is not a new virus. Therefore, it is vital to obtain very detailed information to determine precisely how dangerous the virus is. More information is needed about the spread of the virus, even for people who become only slightly ill or not at all. And of all the people who become sick, you want to know precisely what they have done.

Can someone without symptoms transmit the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?

The novel coronavirus is transmitted by coughing and sneezing. So far, the transmission of the virus by someone without these symptoms seems to play a minimal role. The virus is transmitted from one person to another via coughing or sneezing. The sicker a person, the more virus he can spread. By coughing and sneezing, a person transmits the virus through his nose, throat or lungs. The virus gets into the air through small droplets. If other people inhale these droplets or transfer them via their hands in their mouth, nose or eyes, for example, they can become infected with the virus.

Could the incubation period be much longer than 14 days?

The estimated incubation period has been stable for a long time. The incubation period has been estimated based on data of many patients. It varies from 2 to 12 days; for safety reasons, we use 14 days. If someone reports a longer incubation period, there could also be an unnoticed contact that took place in between, which makes the incubation period only seem longer.

Can the novel coronavirus be spread through cash?

The risk of people being infected by cash is very small. It probably plays only a very small role in the spread of the disease in China. However, the government in China is doing everything it can to prevent the spread, and this measure is apparently also being taken.

With regard to packages from China, these are in transit for several days. If they were infected with the new coronavirus, the virus would not survive the journey. So it is safe to order packages from China.

Since the new coronavirus can be transmitted through dirty hands, regular hand washing is a good measure to prevent the spread of the disease.

How long can the novel coronavirus survive outside the body?

A virus always needs a human or animal to stay alive and multiply. Outside the body, the virus can only survive for a short time. We don't yet know how long that might be exactly.

How quickly can you recover after being infected?

This depends on the severity of the symptoms. People with mild symptoms recover faster (after a few days). People who are hospitalized generally need more time to recover (sometimes weeks).

What is the official name of the new coronavirus?

There are several coronaviruses – viruses that look like a crown (corona means crown in Latin). Known examples are MERS and SARS. In December 2019, a new coronavirus broke out in China. The International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) has called this specific virus SARS severe acute respiratory syndrome -CoV coronavirus -2. This name was chosen because the virus belongs to the SARS family of coronaviruses. SARS stands for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. This virus can cause you to get ill with the disease that is officially called COVID-19. This name was chosen by the WHO. The addition '19' refers to the year 2019, when it was first discovered.

What can we say about the degree of infectiousness during the incubation period?

The new coronavirus is transmitted through coughing and sneezing. Until now, the transmission of the virus seems to play a very limited role during the incubation period, that is before symptoms appear. What is known, however, is that the sicker a person is, the more they spread the virus.

What are the symptoms of the new coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Symptoms are: a fever with respiratory symptoms such as coughing, shortness of breath and pneumonia.

How serious is the new coronavirus (COVID-19)?

What we now know is that of all the identified patients with the new coronavirus, about 17% have serious symptoms. This ratio may change in the coming months. It is quite possible that we are currently only identifying relatively seriously ill patients. About 2% of patients die from the new coronavirus. These are mainly older people and people who are weakened by other diseases.

Is there a treatment for the new coronavirus (COVID-19)?

There is no specific treatment for the new coronavirus. Treatment of seriously ill people consists of counteracting symptoms. For example, physicians can provide extra oxygen to patients who are short of breath.

Questions about the international situations

What is the travel advice for China in connection with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has updated its [travel advice for China](#). There is a negative travel advisory for the province of Hubei. Travel advice for the rest of China is to avoid all but essential travel. For current travel advice, please visit the [World Health Organization website](#).

Chinese tourists can contact the Chinese embassy: 0031-70-3065083 (daytime) or +31-684557449 (in case of emergency).

Is it safe to travel abroad?

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