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Common sense is your best protection.

Sure, everyone's talking about the new coronavirus. But there's no need to panic. For now, at least, most travelers don't need to do anything differently than what they already should be doing. Here's what you need to know.

What Is This New Virus?

In early January 2020, China and the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed the identification of a new virus. It stems from several cases of pneumonia identified in Wuhan, a city in the Chinese province of Hubei, on December 31, 2019. The new virus has been given the temporary name 2019-nCoV.



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sometimes death. Coronaviruses were first identified in the 1960s and have “corona” in their name because, at the molecular level, they’re shaped like a halo.

Coronaviruses can infect humans and animals. When a virus jumps from an animal to a human, or vice versa, the virus can change rapidly and even become a new virus.

Scientists pay close attention to new viruses because they don’t know how they’ll behave and how dangerous they might be. For example, a virus that’s contagious only when the infected person is clearly sick and that causes only minor symptoms isn’t a big concern. But a virus that transmits rapidly, especially before an infected person even realizes they’re sick, is more dangerous, as is one that causes severe symptoms. Viruses that are transmitted by direct contact, like touching mucus membranes or bodily fluids, are easier to control than viruses that are transmitted through the air.

The new coronavirus 2019-nCoV is getting a lot of attention because it’s new and still poses many unknowns.

Should I Be Scared?

At this point, no.

The flu is a deadlier disease than both the new coronavirus and SARS. Dr. William Spangler, Global Medical Director with [AIG Travel](#)

(https://travelguard.secure.force.com/TravelAssistance/resource/1579732765609/Coronavirus_health_advisory), compared the three diseases for Fodor’s. He described how, worldwide, 8,098 people were classified as having SARS with 774 deaths. That’s a mortality rate of 9.56%. We don’t track how many people have the flu, but Dr.

Spangler said that the CDC reported: “6,515 deaths, in the U.S. alone, attributable to Influenza A and B in 2017.” As of this writing, there are approximately 4,500 cases of 2019-nCoV and 106 people have died; that’s a mortality rate of about 2.36%.

While the number of cases and deaths will rise and we still need to learn a lot about 2019-nCoV, current evidence has experts believing it’s controllable. And, thanks to the SARS outbreak, the world takes new viruses much more seriously than in the past.

Following SARS, many countries and health organizations created new measures to deal with new viruses. With 2019-nCoV, authorities have been quick to put in place measures to identify, study and contain it, and to ensure patients get treatment in isolation to protect others from illness. It took five months for scientists to identify SARS, but just days to sequence and develop tests to identify 2019-nCoV. Information sharing among scientists and governments is critical for keeping pathogens like 2019-nCoV under control.

What Should I Do? Change My Travel Plans?

Trust the advice of reputable authorities like the WHO and the CDC. China has placed travel restrictions to and from major epicenters like Wuhan. On January 24, 2020, the [CDC](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/novel-coronavirus-china) (<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/novel-coronavirus-china>) issued a warning to avoid all nonessential travel to China.

What would a travel health expert do? Fodor’s asked Spangler what he would do if he personally had travel planned to the region, for example, if he had a flight transiting through Taipei or Hong Kong. He said, “I would not—as of today (January 27, 2020)—make any alterations to my international travel plans, with the exception of [nonessential] travel to China”. He’d follow the CDC’s advice.

Spangler described the “extraordinary lengths” officials are taking in airports like Hong Kong and Taipei to limit the transmission of 2019-nCoV and told Fodor’s he wouldn’t be concerned about travel there unless the situation changes.

Many airlines are allowing passengers to make changes to their flight plans to and from China. The rules are changing as the situation changes, so check directly with your airline for the latest. Similarly, check with your travel agent or tour provider if you have a cruise or other travel plans in China.

Easy and Common Sense Protections

Basically, if you follow the advice of health experts like the CDC and the World Health Organization, the chance of getting sick from this new coronavirus is slim. And not only is the advice pretty easy, it’s what we should all be doing anyway to prevent colds and cases of flu.

- **Wash Your Hands:** A 20-second scrub using warm running water and soap is best (the Mayo Clinic ([<https://www.fodors.com/news/news/should-you-change-your-travel-plans-because-of-the-coronavirus>](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-</div><div data-bbox=)

depth/hand-washing/art-20046253) says to sing “Happy Birthday” twice). Then, rinse with clean water and dry your hands. It’s important to dry them, though the jury is out about the best way (<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/blowing-hard-2/>) (some studies say hot air blowers spread germs and that paper towels or clean fabric towels are best; other studies disagree). If you don’t have access to a sink, using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol is fine. Regardless, wash your hands often: certainly after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose; before you prepare food; before *and* after eating, and after using the restroom. And throw those used tissues away immediately (and then wash your hands!).

- **Avoid Touching Your Face:** Most viruses and bacteria enter the body through mucous membranes like the mouth, nose, and eyes. It’s easy to re-contaminate your hands after washing them, so keeping your hands away from your face is the best way to prevent germs of any type from getting in you and making you sick.
- **Cough and Sneeze Into Your Elbow:** Yes, covering your cough or sneeze with your hand is preferable to spraying all those tiny virusy droplets directly into the air. But then you’ve contaminated your hand and you’ll inevitably touch something or someone. So, make a new habit of coughing/sneezing into the inside of your elbow. And while you’re at it, break that other habit of crossing your arms and putting your hands right onto your sneeze spots.

People who have higher risks—the immunosuppressed, very old, or very young—should follow the advice of their doctor.

Extra Protections

Still feeling a little paranoid? It’s good practice to regularly disinfect surfaces that get handled frequently ([your phone is filthy \(https://www.thehealthsite.com/diseases-conditions/how-dirty-is-your-phone-305672/\)](https://www.thehealthsite.com/diseases-conditions/how-dirty-is-your-phone-305672/)). On the plane, you can also use a wipe to clean off your tray table, armrests, and seatbelt, though the evidence is unclear whether this is effective in killing germs or just cleaning up that bit of sticky spilled Coke.

It’s wise to keep your distance from sick people. No hugs, kisses, or handshakes, please. And really, during cold and flu season why not keep close contact just for loved ones?

At restaurants, it's wise to do an extra hand wash, ideally after you've given back the menu and before you start to eat. At a buffet, only put food on a clean plate; don't bring your used plate back to the smorgasbord. And while we're at it, let's call a halt to waiters at fancy restaurants picking up your used napkin and refolding it when you step away from the table. Let's all just keep our germs to ourselves, yes?

Should I Wear a Mask?

Speaking of keeping your germs to yourself: if you're sick, wearing a mask is a courtesy to the people around you. You'll be less likely to spread your illness when you cough, sneeze, laugh or talk. But masks aren't perfect. It's hard to keep one on when you're already having difficulty breathing. And most of us don't use masks correctly. We fidget with them, put them on and off without washing our hands, and re-use masks that are meant to be single-use.

The [CDC is recommending \(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/guidance-prevent-spread.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/guidance-prevent-spread.html) that caregivers wear a disposable mask when touching a person sick with 2019-nCoV or when they have contact with the person's body fluids, like disposing of their used tissues.

What if I'm Sick?

Avoid traveling if you feel sick. Your would-be fellow passengers will appreciate you protecting them (even if it's just from the common cold). Given the increased monitoring since the discovery of the new coronavirus, travelers who do show signs of illness could be prevented from boarding a plane, train, or bus. Many airports and seaports have installed thermal imaging cameras to scan people as they walk by. Anyone showing a fever is pulled aside for additional questioning and maybe quarantine.

If you exhibit symptoms of the coronavirus—fever, cough, and difficulty breathing—follow the instructions of your health care provider as soon as possible. Usually, this means calling ahead to your doctor or hospital so that they can take precautions to isolate you from other patients while they carry out testing. Be sure to advise doctors if you've been traveling.

Where to Get Updated Information

A new virus like this coronavirus means a rapidly changing situation. Scientists at WHO and CDC have the up-to-date intel on the virus. They provide information, advice, and, if needed, travel restrictions with the goal of preventing a pandemic. Rely on their advice at the [WHO's \(https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public\)](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public) and [CDC's \(https://www.cdc.gov/media/dpk/diseases-and-conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus-2020.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/media/dpk/diseases-and-conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus-2020.html) websites.

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