

# COVID-19

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## COVID-19

**Primary Disciplinary Field(s):** Epidemiology, Infectious Diseases, Public Health, Virology

### 1. Core Definition

**COVID-19**, an abbreviation for **coronavirus disease 2019**, is an acute and highly contagious respiratory illness instigated by the novel coronavirus, officially designated as **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)**. The disease manifests with a diverse array of symptoms, primarily characterized by a persistent **fever**, a continuous **dry cough**, and significant **fatigue**. Beyond these prevalent indicators, infected individuals may also experience other less common yet notable symptoms, including **nasal congestion**, a **runny nose**, a **sore throat**, and gastrointestinal disturbances such as **diarrhea**. The clinical trajectory of COVID-19 is highly variable, ranging from asymptomatic presentations to severe, life-threatening complications. Approximately one in six patients, according to early epidemiological data, are prone to developing severe breathing difficulties, signaling a critical progression of the illness that often necessitates advanced medical intervention. A heightened risk for severe disease and adverse outcomes is particularly observed among vulnerable demographics, notably the **elderly population** and individuals with pre-existing **underlying health conditions**. These conditions encompass, but are not limited to, chronic **respiratory problems**, **diabetes**, various forms of **cardiac problems**, and **hypertension**, all of which compromise the body's intrinsic capacity to mount an effective immunological response against the viral pathogen.

### 2. Etymology and Historical Development

The nomenclature **COVID-19** is an acronym derived from "**CO**rona**VI**rus **D**isease **2019**," concisely reflecting both the viral family responsible for the infection and the year of its initial documented emergence. The disease first came to global attention in **December 2019**, originating in **Wuhan, China**, marking the initial cluster of cases that would subsequently escalate into an unprecedented global health crisis. Following its discovery, the SARS-CoV-2 virus demonstrated a rapid and alarming capability for international transmission, quickly disseminating across continents and establishing infections in diverse populations within a remarkably short period. Recognizing the escalating global public health threat posed by its widespread dissemination and increasing caseload, the **World Health Organization (WHO)** officially declared COVID-19 a **pandemic** on **March 11, 2020**. This pivotal declaration underscored the extensive geographic reach of the disease, which by that point had already affected more than 125 countries spanning approximately five continents, thereby signifying a critical turning point in the global collective response to this novel and highly virulent pathogen.

### 3. Key Characteristics

The symptomatic profile of COVID-19 is notably diverse, yet consistently includes the primary manifestations of **fever**, a persistent **dry cough**, and profound **fatigue**. Complementary symptoms often reported by patients include **nasal congestion**, a **runny nose**, an irritated **sore throat**, and occasional gastrointestinal disturbances such as **diarrhea**. A defining characteristic of the disease is the wide spectrum of its severity; while many individuals experience mild or moderate symptoms, a significant minority, estimated at one in six patients, progress to developing severe respiratory complications, necessitating intensive medical care and potentially leading to critical outcomes. Furthermore, the disease exhibits a clear predilection for exacerbating health risks in vulnerable demographic groups, with the **elderly** and individuals afflicted with pre-existing conditions like chronic **respiratory problems**, **diabetes**, various **cardiac issues**, and **hypertension** facing a substantially heightened risk of severe illness and adverse health consequences.

The primary mode of **transmission** for **SARS-CoV-2** is through **small respiratory droplets** expelled from an infected individual's nose and/or mouth during common actions such as **coughing**, **sneezing**, or even simply **exhaling**. These droplets can then be inhaled by susceptible individuals in close proximity, leading to new infections. A crucial characteristic influencing the virus's propagation is its demonstrable ability to survive on various inanimate surfaces for extended durations. Scientific testing has revealed that the virus can remain viable for up to **24 hours when present on cardboard** surfaces, and for an even more prolonged period, specifically between **two and three days, on non-porous materials such as stainless steel and plastic**. This persistence on surfaces underscores the importance of rigorous hygiene protocols and environmental decontamination measures in curtailing the virus's spread. Critically, as of the initial phase of the pandemic in **March 2020**, a definitive **cure** or a widely accessible and effective **vaccine** for COVID-19 had not yet been developed, presenting substantial challenges for disease management, prevention strategies, and global public health efforts.

### 4. Significance and Impact

The unprecedented emergence and subsequent rapid global dissemination of **COVID-19** precipitated a profound and far-reaching public health crisis of modern historical significance. The formal declaration of a **pandemic** by the World Health Organization on **March 11, 2020**, served as a stark acknowledgment of its pervasive global impact, fundamentally transforming healthcare systems, economies, and established societal norms across virtually every nation. The inherent infectiousness of the **SARS-CoV-2** virus, coupled with its proven capacity to induce severe illness and mortality, particularly within vulnerable populations, necessitated the swift and widespread implementation of comprehensive public health interventions. These measures were strategically designed to control its exponential spread, mitigate its devastating impact on human health, and prevent the catastrophic collapse of healthcare infrastructures worldwide.

In direct response to the identified transmission pathways, which prominently included direct respiratory droplet transmission and the potential for indirect contact via contaminated surfaces, globally endorsed strategies for prevention assumed paramount importance. These universally adopted public health measures emphasized the critical necessity of consistent and thorough **handwashing** practices, the diligent and appropriate utilization of **face masks** in public and communal environments, and the widespread adoption of rigorous **social distancing** protocols, typically recommending a minimum physical separation of at least one meter between individuals. Collectively, these multifaceted interventions were meticulously designed to interrupt the intricate chains of viral transmission and substantially reduce the overall incidence of infection. The pandemic irrevocably reshaped global dialogues concerning infectious disease preparedness, underscored profound disparities in health equity, and vividly highlighted the intrinsic interconnectedness of global communities, thereby accentuating the urgent imperative for robust international collaboration in effectively addressing transnational health threats.

## 5. Debates and Criticisms

During its nascent stages, particularly as reflected by the informational landscape in early March 2020, the overarching challenges pertaining to **COVID-19** revolved primarily around the urgent need for rapid identification of its precise characteristics, detailed understanding of its complex transmission dynamics, and the accelerated development of effective therapeutic and preventive countermeasures. At this critical juncture, the most pressing "criticism," or more accurately, the most significant area of global concern, was the stark and undeniable reality that a specific, targeted **cure or vaccine** for the disease remained entirely unavailable. This pronounced absence placed immense and unprecedented pressure on healthcare systems globally, as patient management strategies were largely supportive in nature, focusing predominantly on alleviating symptoms and providing critical care for severely ill patients, rather than relying on targeted antiviral treatments or widespread prophylactic immunization.

The initial global response to the pandemic was characterized by an intense and collaborative mobilization of scientific resources, dedicated to understanding the novel pathogen, rapidly developing reliable diagnostic tests, and expediting research into potential therapeutic agents and viable vaccine candidates. Public health strategies, while undeniably crucial in controlling initial outbreaks, also encountered scrutiny regarding their practical efficacy, profound economic ramifications, and far-reaching social implications. The inherent lack of comprehensive scientific understanding during this nascent phase frequently led to dynamically evolving public health guidelines and, at times, considerable public confusion, thereby underscoring the inherently dynamic and challenging nature of managing a novel pandemic and highlighting the continuous imperative for robust scientific inquiry and highly adaptive policy-making. For the latest authoritative information and evolving guidelines, individuals were consistently directed to consult reputable sources such as the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](https://www.cdc.gov).

## Further Reading

World Health Organization. *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic*.  
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *COVID-19*.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

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