

2019 Novel Coronavirus

Despite the many conspiracy theories and political agendas associated with COVID-19, there is indeed a scientific explanation for the world's newest pandemic. The novel, or "new," coronavirus is not associated with the popular beer, but rather a family of viruses that cause illnesses ranging from a cold to SARS and MERS (Sweeney, 2020).

This particular infection originated in the Wuhan region of China in late 2019 according to WHO. While the commonly heard story is that the infection spread to humans from "some guy eating a bat," there is not clear proof of how exactly the virus made the jump from animal to human. However, it does appear to have started in an outdoor live animal market, and it does have some similarities to other coronaviruses carried by bats. Researchers have officially debunked any theory that this infection is a result of biological warfare experimenting by any country (Sweeney, 2020).

COVID-19 was seriously downplayed during its first stages of transmission. It was first isolated to China, and rarely discussed except for as the butt of a joke. The virus quickly began to spread to other parts of the world, and we realized just how contagious it is. Borders began to close, but far too late. Still, President Trump compared COVID to the common Flu via Twitter in early March (Epstein, 2020). Just two days later, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic with over 120,000 cases and 4,300 associated deaths worldwide (Rettner, 2020). Those numbers have since jumped exponentially.

The main reason COVID spreads so quickly is due to its two-week incubation period. This means that someone may have been exposed, and could be carrying the virus, for as long as two weeks before any symptoms start to present. These symptoms can vary from a cough and a fever to severe respiratory distress, and more potential symptoms are being added every day as more people test positive. Some people may never even exhibit symptoms at all. One professor explains the transmission as such: "If you infect 1.3 people with the flu, and they infect 1.3 people, and so on, after that has happened ten times you will be responsible for giving the flu to 14 people. If you infect 3 people with COVID-19, and they infect three people, and so on ... you will have been responsible for a whopping 59,049 people" (Epstein, 2020). Given these exponential numbers, and the two-week incubation period, one single person can infect thousands of people without even knowing they have the virus. The virus spreads mainly by

respiratory droplets, created when people sneeze, talk, etc. Other people within 6 to 8 feet inhale the droplets, thus spreading the infection (Sweeney, 2020). The extremely high rate of transmission is one of the most dangerous aspects of the virus.

In addition to the incubation period, there is a severe lack of available tests for the virus. Due to this shortage, most people are not able to be tested, typically with the only exceptions being that they are exhibiting severe symptoms requiring hospitalization, or that they are healthcare workers. The CDC recommends treating every person as if they have the virus, and act as though you could be carrying it yourself; however, deceptively low numbers of positive tests in some areas have lured people into a false sense of security, which results in a lack of social distancing practices and further enables the spread of COVID-19.

Although COVID-19 is usually not fatal, there are certain “at risk” populations including those with underlying respiratory conditions or anyone over the age of 65. The fast transmission leads to an overwhelming number of people requiring treatment all at once in specific areas. This has caused a severe lack of resources in many areas of the country, and left everyone scrambling to come up with alternatives for personal protection equipment and ventilators. Various big-name companies have even turned their businesses to manufacturing these things instead of their typical product during the crisis.

Many states have turned to temporary laws in order to limit the spread of the infection. Colleges and universities stopped face to face classes and sent students home in early March. Public schools quickly followed suit and closed their doors, too. Maine did not see its first confirmed case until March 12. On March 24th, with 118 cases in the state, Governor Mills ordered the closure of all “non-essential” businesses for at least two weeks. She also prohibited gatherings of more than 10 people, and closed all dine-in services at bars and restaurants in the state. On March 31st, with 303 cases, she issued a new order overruling the previous one, instructing all Maine residents to stay at home except for absolutely necessary purposes, such as for food or for an essential job, until May 1st. This also included the mandated termination of classroom instruction until at least May 1st, a mandate that people remain 6 feet apart, and a limit on the number of customers allowed in essential spaces based on square footage of the buildings (Maine.gov, 2020). Today, just 28 days after having only one confirmed case, the state stands at 560 confirmed cases across 15 counties, and 16 total deaths related to the virus.

Finally, in addition to the physical danger posed by COVID-19, the widespread shutdown of business has created the potential for one of the worst economic crashes since the Great Depression. Small businesses are left unable to operate from home and sustain themselves, and record numbers of people are left unemployed by the closure of businesses deemed non-essential. Congress has rushed to pass a number of emergency bills to provide economic support to the people of the US, but we have yet to see if it will be enough, as families all across the country struggle just to keep food on their tables.

COVID-19 will almost surely be remembered for decades, or centuries, as the pandemic of 2020. With over 1,500,00 cases worldwide, still spreading every day, it is hard to tell how long it will take to overcome. The most important thing is that we each remain calm, educate ourselves on the true facts, and follow the instructions of our leaders to do our part in “flattening the curve,” to finally immobilize the virus and put an end to this crisis.

References

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