

Lesson 03: what is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

❖ Definition:

A coronavirus is a virus that is found in animals and, rarely, can be transmitted from animals to humans and then spread person to person. A new virus called the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) has been identified as the cause of a disease outbreak that began in China in 2019. The disease is called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The virus is a type of coronavirus — a family of viruses that can cause illnesses such as the common cold and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

❖ What are the symptoms of COVID-19 Infection?

Symptoms of COVID-19 vary in severity from having no symptoms at all to having fever, cough, sore throat, general weakness and fatigue and muscular pain and in the most severe cases, severe pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome, sepsis and septic shock, all potentially leading to death. Reports show that clinical deterioration can occur rapidly, often during the second week of disease. Recently, anosmia – loss of the sense of smell – (and in some cases the loss of the sense of taste) have been reported as a symptom of a COVID-19 infection. There is already evidence from South Korea, China and Italy that patients with confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection have developed anosmia/hyposmia, in some cases in the absence of any other symptoms.

Elderly people above 70 years of age and those with underlying health conditions (e.g. hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease and cancer) are considered to be more at risk of developing severe symptoms. Men in these groups also appear to be at a slightly higher risk than females. Smokers, just like elders, are more likely to be at risk from coronavirus, because Smoking can make people more susceptible to breathing complications caused by the disease. However, Children appear to have a much lower risk than adults of developing symptoms or severe disease.

❖ **Is there a treatment for the COVID-19 disease?**

First of all, there is no specific treatment or vaccine for this disease, although work on a vaccine has already started by several research groups and pharmaceutical companies worldwide. Hence, it may be months to more than a year before a vaccine has been tested and is ready for use in humans.

In this case, Healthcare providers are mostly using a symptomatic approach, meaning they treat the symptoms rather than target the virus, and provide supportive care (e.g. oxygen therapy, fluid management) for infected persons, which can be highly effective.

In severe and critically ill patients, a number of drugs are being tried to target the virus, but the use of these need to be more carefully assessed in randomized controlled trials. Several clinical trials are ongoing to assess their effectiveness but results are not yet available.

So, the only available solution to protect yourself from this pandemic is to stay home.