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Corona viruses are a group of related viruses that cause diseases in mammals and birds. In humans, corona virus cause respiratory tract infections that can be mild, such as some cases of the common cold (among other possible causes, predominantly rhinoviruses), and others that can be lethal, such as SARS, MERS, and COVID-19. Symptoms in other species vary: in chickens, they cause an upper respiratory tract disease, while in cows and pigs they cause diarrhea.

## How did Covid-19 start?

The disease [appears to have originated](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports) from a Wuhan seafood market where wild animals, including marmots, birds, rabbits, bats and snakes, are traded illegally. Corona viruses are known to jump from animals to humans, so it’s thought that the first people infected with the disease – a group primarily made up of stallholders from the seafood market – contracted it from contact with animals.

The hunt for the animal source of Covid-19 is still unknown, although there are some strong contenders. A team of virologists at the Wuhan Institute for Virology [released a detailed paper](https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.01.22.914952v1.full.pdf) showing that the new corona viruses' genetic makeup is 96 per cent identical to that of a corona virus found in bats, while [a study published on March 26](https://https/www.nature.com/articles/s41586-020-2169-0) argues that genetic sequences of corona virus in pangolins are between 88.5 and 92.4 per cent similar to the human virus. Some early cases of Covid-19, however, appear to have inflicted people with no link to the Wuhan market at all, suggesting that the initial route of human infection may pre-date the market cases.

The Wuhan market was shut down for inspection and cleaning on January 1, but by then it appears that Covid-19 was already starting to spread beyond the market itself. On January 21, the [WHO Western Pacific office](https://twitter.com/WHOWPRO/status/1219478547644813312?s=20) said the disease was also being transmitted between humans – evidence of which is apparent after medical staff became infected with the virus.

## What are the symptoms of Covid-19?

Covid-19 shares many of its symptoms with the flu or common cold, although there are certain symptoms common to flu and colds that are not usually seen in Covid-19. People with confirmed cases of Covid-19 rarely suffer from a runny nose, for instance.

The most common Covid-19 symptoms are a fever and a dry cough. Of 55,924 early Chinese cases of the disease, nearly 90 per cent of patients experienced a fever and just over two-thirds suffered with a dry cough. That’s why the UK government is advising anyone with a high temperature or a new, continuous cough to stay at home for seven days or, if they live with other people, for the entire household to isolate for 14 days from the first onset of symptoms.

Other Covid-19 symptoms are less common. Just under 40 per cent of people with the disease experience fatigue, while a third of people cough up sputum – a thick mucus from within the lungs. Other rarer symptoms include shortness of breath, muscle pain, sore throats, headaches or chills, loss of smell or taste. According to the WHO, symptoms tend to appear between five and six days after infection.