

COVID-19, also known as coronavirus disease 2019, is a respiratory illness caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2. It first emerged in Wuhan, China in December 2019, and then spread throughout the world, leading to the ongoing pandemic.

### **Cause**

COVID-19 is caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. It's a specific type of coronavirus, a large group of viruses that can infect animals and humans. Coronaviruses get their name from the crown-like spikes on their surface.

### **Spread**

The virus spreads in a few ways:

- **Through the air:** When an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, sings, or breathes, they release respiratory droplets containing the virus. People nearby can inhale the droplets or they can land on the eyes, nose, or mouth.
- **Surface transmission:** In some cases, the virus can spread by touching a surface contaminated with the virus and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. This is thought to be a less common way for COVID-19 to spread.

Here are some factors that can influence how easily COVID-19 spreads:

- **Close contact:** The closer you are to someone who is infected, the greater the risk of getting sick.
- **Poor ventilation:** In spaces with stagnant air, infectious particles can linger for longer periods, increasing the risk of inhalation.
- **Duration of exposure:** The longer you spend around someone who is contagious, the higher the chance of catching the virus.
- **Symptoms**

COVID-19 symptoms can range from mild to severe and can take up to two weeks to appear after exposure. Some people may not experience any symptoms at all. Here are some of the most common symptoms:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- Loss of smell or taste

- Nasal congestion and runny nose
- Sore throat
- Diarrhea

**Current Situation**

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency in January 2020 and a pandemic in March 2020. As of May 2023, the WHO ended the public health emergency of international concern designation for COVID-19. However, many countries are still seeing cases of COVID-19, though generally at lower levels than during the peak of the pandemic.

In Canada, COVID-19 activity levels have been slowly decreasing or remaining low. You can find the latest information on COVID-19 in Canada, including statistics and resources, on the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada [Canada.ca].