



# NEW CORONAVIRUS IS NO REASON TO PANIC

Seems like Filipinos are in panic mode because the World Health Organization has declared novel coronavirus outbreak a global health emergency. Local health officials have also confirmed the first case of the new virus. How deadly and infectious is it?

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**MEDICAL NOTES**  
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The undue alarm that the Wuhan coronavirus (2019-nCoV) has generated among Filipinos is the result of widespread media coverage of the infection coupled with the numerous false news about the illness being posted on social media. The Philippines on Jan. 30 has confirmed its first case of novel coronavirus. In a press conference, health secretary Francisco Duque III said a 38-year-old Chinese woman from Wuhan, China was confirmed to be infected with the virus. Given our geographic proximity to China, however, and the relatively heavy human traffic between the Philippines and China, there is a distinct possibility that, as it did in Thailand, Macau, Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam, and Japan, this new infection will spread to our country. But even if this happens, existing figures indicate that the disease is not going to be as catastrophic as many prophets of doom make it appear to be.

The Wuhan coronavirus was first reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) on Dec. 31, 2019. As of Thursday, Jan. 30, across China, more than 8,000 confirmed cases of the infection with 170 deaths have been recorded. Most of

the cases can be traced to a large market with live animals in Wuhan, China.

More than 20 other countries have likewise reported a total of close to 70 cases. The actual number of cases is probably several times higher than the confirmed ones because most infections are benign and are not brought to the attention of medical authorities. Hence, overall the fatality rate from the virus is low. There have also been few instances of the virus spreading from patients to health care workers which suggest that some limited person-to-person transmission may be occurring, but at the same time, the virus is evidently not readily transmissible. On the whole, epidemiologic figures suggest that the virus is not highly contagious and it's not very lethal.

#### The coronaviruses and 2019 nCoV

Coronaviruses affect the respiratory tract not only of people but also of other mammals. Human coronaviruses generally give rise to benign colds, but some animal coronaviruses such as the SARS (from bats and civet cats), MERS (from camels), and now 2019-nCoV, which have evolved to enable them to infect people and acquire the ability to spread between people, cause more serious infections including fatal pneumonia.

The 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak, which also originated in China, spread to more than two dozen countries,

sickened 8,098 people, about 800 of whom died. Fortunately, since then, there has been no report of new cases of SARS anywhere in the world.

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), on the other hand, which was first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012 is even deadlier (as of Aug. 2018, 2,228 cases of the disease have been reported with 449 deaths). The MERS virus is still actively circulating but few new infections are being reported.

With 170 deaths out of more than 8,000 confirmed cases, 2019-nCoV appears to be not as lethal as the MERS and SARS coronaviruses.

#### What you can do to prevent infection with the Wuhan coronavirus?

To stem the entry of this new virus into the Philippines, our Department of Health has strengthened screening at all points of entry to our country.

As far as you (as well as other Filipinos) are concerned, you can adopt the following everyday preventive measures against communicable diseases suggested by the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention to minimize your chances of getting infected with the virus:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not

available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact, such as kissing, sharing cups, or sharing eating utensils, with sick people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as toys and doorknobs.

(Note: Email inquiries on health matters to: [medical\\_notes2@yahoo.com](mailto:medical_notes2@yahoo.com))