Overview of coronaviruses

The right clinical information, right where it's needed

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Introduction

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some of which cause illness in people, and others that circulate among mammals and birds. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can spread to humans, and then spread between people. Zoonotic coronaviruses have emerged in recent years to cause human outbreaks such as COVID-19, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS).

Illness in humans mainly manifests as a respiratory infection, or sometimes gastrointestinal infection. The clinical spectrum of illness varies from no symptoms or mild respiratory symptoms to severe, rapidly progressive pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome, septic shock, or multi-organ failure resulting in death.
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Conditions

◊ COVID-19
» see our comprehensive coverage of COVID-19
An acute respiratory infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was first identified in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, in December 2019. Since then it has spread to many countries, with the number of global cases and deaths exceeding the toll from the 2002-2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak. The case fatality rate is approximately 2% to 3% based on initial information.

◊ Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS)
» see our comprehensive coverage of Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS)
An acute viral respiratory tract infection caused by MERS-CoV. It was first identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012. Cases have been limited to the Arabian Peninsula and its surrounding countries, and to travellers from the Middle East or their contacts. The case fatality rate is approximately 37%.

◊ Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)
» see our comprehensive coverage of Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)
An acute viral respiratory tract infection caused by SARS-CoV. It was first identified in the Guangdong province of Southern China in 2002. The epidemic affected 26 countries and resulted in more than 8000 cases and 774 deaths in 2003. There have been no reported cases since 2004. The case fatality rate is approximately 10%.
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