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The Coronavirus Pandemic: Frequently Asked Questions

What is the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 disease, and where did it come from?

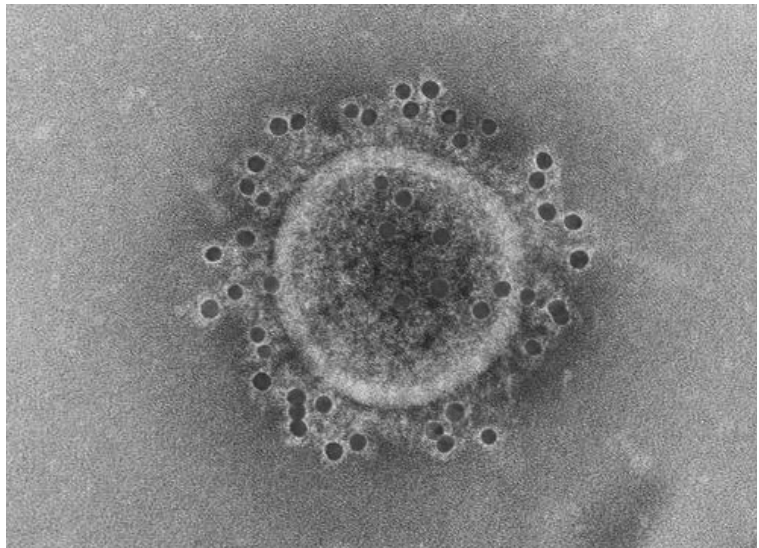
The new coronavirus is one of a large family of viruses, including those that cause the common cold as well as the one that caused the deadly 2002-3 SARS epidemic. Humans are not known to have contracted this virus before November 2019, which is important because it means we have no natural immunity to it and no vaccines or treatments now or expected soon.

Most scientists currently believe that this coronavirus existed among animals in some closely related form

and that some small mutation made it possible for humans to catch it. This is a common pattern for the emergence of new diseases throughout human history.

In recent decades, such diseases have become more frequent and widespread, with new ones cropping up periodically—SARS in 2002, bird (avian) flu (repeated outbreaks since 2004), swine flu (H1N1) in 2009, and others. One reason this is happening more is that human society is encroaching on animal habitats, so there is closer contact between species. Another is that the world is highly interconnected. Unlike 200 years ago, a person who contracts a new virus today may easily travel thousands of miles, spreading the virus before they even know they are infected.

An important point here is that because this coronavirus in humans was first observed only about three months ago, there is still a lot that scientists don't know, or don't have great certainty or accuracy about. And some aspects of what we think we know now may turn out to be incorrect later.



A model of the Coronavirus COVID-19.

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