

Coronavirus 101: Information on San Bernardino County



San Bernardino County public health and safety officials update the board of supervisors on the coronavirus response during its meeting Tuesday, March 10, 2020. (Photo by Sandra Emerson/SCNG)

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Yes, the [novel coronavirus](#) is a pandemic of international dimensions.

But it's also a local disease. While data and stories about the virus in current hot zones like China, Iran and Italy are important, that information might be less useful to you than what is or isn't happening at your child's school, or the next Angels game.

For the latest on coronavirus and [San Bernardino County](#), [click here](#).

With that in mind, here are some basics about the new coronavirus, along with information about how it is and isn't affecting people in San Bernardino County.

(Please note that what's known about the new coronavirus is changing as scientists learn more. What's more, information about how San Bernardino County is handling the crisis is evolving. [We'll update this post as new information warrants.](#))

What is it?

The World Health Organization describes the novel coronavirus as a member of “a large family of viruses” that cause everything from the common cold to SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). The version we’re talking about right now causes COVID-19, a flu-like upper-respiratory disease that wasn’t well known until late last year, when a large number of cases popped up in the Wuhan province of China.

What’s the deal in San Bernardino County?

As of Monday, March 30, there were [111 cases of COVID-19 in the county and three deaths](#).

Cases increased over the weekend, as the county reported [12 residents of a nursing facility in Yucaipa tested positive](#). One patient, an [89-year-old woman with underlying health issues](#), died from the illness on Thursday. A resident of a nursing facility in Mentone is also presenting symptoms of the disease

[Two county firefighters tested positive](#), including one who works for the fire protection district and the other for the Montclair Fire Department. Both entered self-isolation after experiencing flu-like symptoms.

At the California Institution for Men in Chino, seven employees and [one inmate](#) have tested positive, officials said Sunday. That number is up from two employees with coronavirus, which had been announced a week ago.

[At least three San Bernardino County Sheriff’s deputies](#) have tested positive for the disease.

The county held a [pilot drive-thru testing event Friday](#), which yielded 380 appointments. County officials said infection data by city would be released [once there are 100 confirmed cases](#).

After reporting its third case March 17, [county public health officials called for all gatherings](#) of any size to be canceled through at least April 6. They also told all movie theaters, gyms, health clubs, adult entertainment venues, bars and businesses that sell alcohol, but not food, to close.

However, as of March 20, San Bernardino County, like the rest of the state, was under a [“Stay at Home” order issued by Gov. Gavin Newsom](#). The order asks everyone to stay at home and only leave for essential jobs, errands and exercise. This doesn’t apply to grocery stores, healthcare, gas stations or banks. Restaurants can still operate, but only for delivery or takeout.

[Almost all county departments are offering services only online and over the phone](#) as officials have closed public offices until at least April 3.

County-run attractions, including regional parks, museums and libraries are closed. Several senior and community centers are closed. However, centers with meal programs will make meals available via drive-thru. [County offices have also been closed](#), with services available only online or by phone.

The Housing Authority has closed its offices to the public until April 1, but will be able to help by phone or email.

[Several courthouses in the San Bernardino County Superior Court system](#) will be closed through April 2. Some will be open for a few hours a day for limited emergency matters.

On Tuesday, March 10, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors [ratified a public health emergency declaration from Dr. Erin Gustafson](#), the county's acting health officer, that was made earlier in the day and the board also declared its own. The board also voted to allow emergency purchases.

The declaration will help the [county get state and federal money, buy equipment and supplies](#) and make other decisions more quickly, board Chairman Curt Hagman said. A Redlands patient whose respiratory symptoms led two firefighters/paramedics to voluntarily self-quarantine [tested negative for the new coronavirus](#).

[Big Bear Lake Mayor Rick Herrick](#) and a staff member at [H. Frank Dominguez Elementary School](#) in San Bernardino have tested positive for COVID-19.

The county's Auditor-Controller/Treasurer/Tax Collector's office will be closed beginning Monday, March 23 until further notice, but [payments can still be made online or by phone](#).

Visible steps to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus by [cities in the greater San Bernardino area and the Inland Valley](#) also ramped up this week.

How many people have this?

As of March 30, more than 764,800 people worldwide had been diagnosed with COVID-19 and at least 36,864 had died. More than 160,148 have recovered.

The United States has the most cases in the world, with more than 152,600. At least 2,817 have died and 5,211 have recovered.

In California, there have been [more than 4,600 confirmed cases](#) and at least 101 deaths as of Friday.

(The website [WorldOMeter](#), which provides information and statistics about international events, offers daily updates.)

But testing has been more common in some countries, and virtually unavailable in others — including the United States — so the actual number of cases isn't known.

What are the symptoms?

The basics are fever, coughing and shortness of breath. Other symptoms can (but don't always) include some combination of fatigue, body aches, nasal congestion, sore throat and diarrhea.

It can, though it probably won't.

Symptoms of COVID-19 generally are mild and take hold over a period that can run between two to 14 days. Some who are infected don't develop symptoms and never feel ill. And most of the people (eight in ten, according to latest estimates) who do exhibit symptoms recover without special medical treatment.

However, about one in six people who get COVID-19 become seriously ill, developing respiratory problems.

But everything about COVID-19 is new. The type of coronavirus that causes the disease is called the "novel" because it was virtually unknown until December. As a result, the actual threat posed by COVID-19 is evolving.

Some epidemiologists have looked at data from China, where more than 100,000 people have contracted the disease, and suggested a death rate of 1.5% to 3.4%. By comparison, the types of flu that typically circulate through the United States are much less lethal, killing only about 0.1% of the people who catch them.

But as health experts learn more about the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19, and how it behaves, they're finding that some number of people probably carry the disease without exhibiting symptoms. If true, that could significantly reduce the death rate. Some have speculated that the COVID-19 death rate could settle in at 0.5%, far more lethal than a typical flu but less horrific than the numbers currently being thrown around.

But, again, all of that is speculation at this point.

Who is at risk?

The [older you are the more vulnerable you are to becoming seriously ill](#), a result of the natural decline in your immune system as you age. Others at risk of contracting dangerous versions of COVID-19 include people with high blood pressure, heart problems and diabetes.

The vast majority of people who contract COVID-19 recover, and many exhibit only mild symptoms.

Scientists continue to look at the risk that the novel coronavirus does or doesn't pose to children, and how high the risk is for younger people in general.

A lot of [universities are switching to online instruction](#).

What's the plan for public schools in San Bernardino County?

[All San Bernardino County public schools will be closed](#) until May 1.

Most districts in the county decided last week to close schools, many through April 3, but since then confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the county have continued to rise prompting county Superintendent Ted Alejandre to extend the closure.

The decision was made by local education and health officials.

[Many county schools are offering meals for students](#) and some districts are offering instruction and childcare. Resources and tools are available on the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools website, sbcss.k12.ca.us.

How do I catch it?

Though scientists speculate the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 originally jumped from animals to people, the global health crisis is the result of a simple fact that people catch the virus from other people.

It's not yet known if people spread the disease only when they're symptomatic, or if the disease can jump from a person before they feel ill. For now, experts believe the disease seems to spread easily, and that the rate of infection hasn't shown signs of slowing in the way that most versions of the flu become less common in warmer weather.

Transmission happens when a person with the disease exhales, coughs or sneezes and droplets wind up in another person's nose or mouth, either directly or after first landing on an object or surface. If another person inhales a droplet or touches an infected surface and then rubs their eyes, nose or mouth without washing their hand, transmission is possible.

It's believed that people can catch the disease by handling or touching an object that's been handled or touched by somebody carrying the virus, but it's not considered a primary way for the disease to spread and it's not yet known how long the virus can last outside the body.

It's also not known if the disease can be spread by food handlers.

How do I not catch it?

Washing [hands regularly — with soap and water, or with an alcohol-based hand rub](#) — is a great start. Soap or alcohol typically kills viruses, though you should wash thoroughly for best results.

Don't shake hands, hugs, kiss or even get close enough to air kiss. In general, you want to stay at least three feet away from anybody, particularly anybody who might be symptomatic. And, if possible, avoid touching your own eyes, nose and mouth.

You can also help others not catch it by sneezing into a tissue or hankie or, if you don't have either, the crook of your elbow. If you feel crummy — even if you have what you think is a mild cold — don't go to work or school. The symptoms of COVID-19 typically are mild at the outset.

What should I do if I think I have it?

If you suspect you have COVID-19, call a doctor. The World Health Organization, among others, points out that going directly to a physician's office or an emergency room puts others at risk and doesn't improve the initial quality of care you're likely to receive.

A lot of experts say the only [people who need masks are those who are sick with COVID-19](#) (the N95 mask will keep you from spreading it to others) and people caring for such patients.

Will my pet give me coronavirus? Can I give it to my pet?

[No and no.](#)

What public events, meetings, gatherings and the like have been canceled coronavirus?

Many. Here's a list of [Southern California cancellations that's being updated pretty regularly](#).

Many cities and agencies are moving toward online meetings or canceling them altogether.

San Bernardino County residents who have questions about the new coronavirus can call 909-387-3911 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, for general information and resources about the virus.

This is not a medical hotline. Residents who are feeling sick are asked to call their health care provider or 9-1-1. For information on social services call 2-1-1.

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Follow all of our coronavirus coverage [here](#).