

Coronavirus & COVID-19:

Glossary of Terms

(From: UVA Health)

The coronavirus pandemic has introduced us to new words and phrases. Understanding what they mean can help you protect yourself from infection and decrease anxiety.

Asymptomatic

Not showing any symptoms (signs of disease or illness). Some people without any symptoms still have and can spread the coronavirus. They're asymptomatic, but contagious. Fever, cough, and shortness of breath are the main symptoms of COVID-19. Call your healthcare provider or a UVA clinic if you have any of the symptoms.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

The United States' federal health protection organization.

Communicable

Similar in meaning as "contagious." Used to describe diseases that can be spread or transmitted from one person to another.

Community spread

The spread of an illness within a particular location, like a neighborhood or town. During community spread, there's no clear source of contact or infection.

Confirmed case

Someone tested and confirmed to have COVID-19.

Congregate settings

Public places that can get crowded and where contact with infected people can happen. This includes places like malls, theaters, and grocery stores.

Coronavirus

A family of related viruses. Many of them cause respiratory illnesses. Coronaviruses cause COVID-19, SARS, MERS, and some strains of influenza, or flu. The coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is officially called SARS-CoV-2, which stands for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2.

COVID-19

The name of the illness caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. COVID-19 stands for "coronavirus disease 2019."

Epidemic

A situation where more cases of disease than expected happen in a given area or to a group of people.

Epidemiology

The branch of medicine that studies how diseases happen and spread in communities of people. A person who studies epidemiology is called an epidemiologist.

Flattening the curve

Controlling the rate of new cases of COVID-19.

The "curve" refers to a graph showing the number of cases of COVID-19 that happen over a period of time. Many cases happening in a short period of time create a graph that looks like a tall spike.

By using protective measures, we can slow down how many new cases happen. This is the "flattening" of the curve – on the graph, the flattened curve winds up looking more like a gentle hill.

Too many new cases happening in a short time can create a serious problem. Hospital systems only have so many supplies, like beds and PPE. There are also only so many doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers. Too many patients at one time can overwhelm these resources. This means sick and injured people may not get needed treatment.

Flattening the curve reduces the numbers of people needing healthcare at one time. This allows hospitals to treat patients throughout the pandemic.

Immunity

Your body's ability to resist or fight off an infection. Your immune system is a network of cells throughout your body that help you avoid getting infected and help you get better when you are infected.

Immunocompromised

Also called immune-compromised or immunodeficient. This describes someone who has an immune system that can't resist or fight off infections as well as most people. This can be caused by several illnesses. Some treatments for illnesses can also cause someone to be immunocompromised.

Incubation period

The time it takes for someone with an infection to start showing symptoms. For COVID-19, symptoms appear 2-14 days after infection.

Outbreak

A sudden increase of a specific illness in a small area.

Pandemic

When a new disease spreads to many countries around the world.

PPE

PPE Stands for personal protective equipment. This includes masks, face shields, gloves, gowns and other coverings that healthcare workers use to prevent the spread of infection to themselves and other patients.

Person under investigation (PUI)

When a health provider suspects a person has the coronavirus. But, no test has confirmed the infection.

Presumptive positive case

When a person tests positive for the coronavirus, but the CDC hasn't confirmed the case.

Quarantine

Sometimes called "isolation." Quarantines keep people away from each other to prevent the spread of disease. Stay-at-home orders are a type of quarantine.

Governments sometimes order quarantines to keep healthy people from exposure to infected people. They give rules to behavior and boundaries to movement.

Screening

This is not the same as a coronavirus test. This step helps healthcare workers to decide if you actually need a coronavirus test. It's a series of basic questions about your health condition and recent history. Screening may also include other common healthcare procedures, like taking your temperature.

Self-isolation

Also called self-quarantine. Separating yourself when you're sick from healthy individuals to prevent spreading illness.

Shelter in place

An order for people to stay where they are and not leave for their own protection. A stay-at-home order is a kind of shelter-in-place order.

Social distancing

Also called physical distancing. It means putting space between yourself and other people at all times. The goal is to slow down how fast an infection spreads. Stay-at-home orders are a way that the government can enforce social distancing.

The CDC recommends keeping at least six feet between you and others around you in public. Social distancing also includes avoiding crowds and groups in public.

Symptomatic

When a person shows signs of illness. For COVID-19, that includes cough, fever or shortness of breath.

Ventilator

A machine that supplies oxygen to a patient with severe lung issues. People with severe cases of COVID-19 can't provide enough oxygen to their body. Their lungs are too limited.

A ventilator machine requires a specialist or respiratory therapist. It is more invasive than an oxygen mask. Many hospitals don't have a supply of ventilators big enough for the COVID-19 outbreak.

World Health Organization (WHO)

This United Nations organization monitors and protects public health around the world.

Zoonotic

This means that a disease was originally detected in animals, but is now infecting people also.