

THE SECOND TEXT

## How best to prevent coronavirus: three burning questions answered

By [Lauren Chadwick](#) •



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China has locked down 13 cities — and their 38 million residents — in an effort to contain the deadly coronavirus outbreak.

But have these methods to contain the virus been working and what steps should global communities be taking to protect themselves from this epidemic?

Euronews spoke to infectious disease experts about the best ways to contain the virus.

### **Will locking down cities help to contain coronavirus?**

Experts say it's uncertain if locking down cities will be effective in containing the novel coronavirus since it hasn't really been done before.

“Generally speaking, we try to avoid doing things like that because you end up getting people panicking and trying to flee the area,” said Dr Nathalie MacDermott, a clinical lecturer at King’s

College London.

People often will try to refuse the quarantine, but in China, the population could be more compliant with more people on board with it, MacDermott said. This is in large part due to messaging after the country suffered a similar coronavirus outbreak in the early 2000s - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

"This is probably the best method to contain the virus, but how effective it is will depend on factors that we haven't really nailed down yet," said Andrew Pekosz, a professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at Johns Hopkins University.

Those factors include how the virus is transmitted and how quickly an infected person can spread the virus.

But Nischay Mishra, a virologist at Columbia University, said the steps China has taken are coming "too late already" especially given that the country is densely populated.

"Things are moving very fast right now," he said, noting that it's already spread overseas.

Most people will not need to be hospitalized for respiratory illness, MacDermott added. It's important for people not to "overburden" the health system by alerting authorities but not necessarily travelling to hospitals where they could infect other people unless they need medical attention.

Those who have died so far have mostly been older people who had other underlying illnesses or complications, World Health Organization experts said at a press conference on Thursday.

## **Is wearing a mask effective in avoiding coronavirus?**

Many of the people photographed in China have been wearing a mask in an effort to prevent contracting the virus, but is that truly an effective way of preventing its spread?

For people who are infected, masks can help to prevent the spread of droplets associated with respiratory illness, experts say.

"If you're unwell and you wear a mask yes it can be effective because obviously you're not coughing into your hand so you're not going to shake someone else's hand... you interrupt that method of transmission," said MacDermott.

Masks to protect people from actually contracting the illness have to be biological grade masks, which are often pricey but other masks become damp as we breathe, and if someone were to cough on them, it could make matters worse, she added.

Surgeons, for example, wear masks to protect their patients from germs, not to protect themselves.

"If an individual is infected...a face mask would help prevent transmission to others," said Jennifer Lighter, a hospital epidemiologist and assistant professor of pediatric infectious diseases at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine. But "there is no reason for the general population to wear face masks," she said.

Ultimately, "multiple protective approaches always work best", according to Pekosz. "Masks should minimize exposure, but they should be combined with good hand hygiene and social distancing."

## **Should hygiene be improved at markets?**

This novel coronavirus — designated 2019-nCoV by the World Health Organization — started at a wholesale fish and live animal market in Wuhan, China where different animal species were sold, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

The virus was first contracted from an animal but it was later confirmed that humans could infect other humans. Experts say that regulations need to be put in place to prevent exotic animals or livestock from coming into contact with food.

"Live animal markets allow animals and humans to come into close contact. That facilitates the movement of viruses and bacteria between species," said Pekosz.

He says that these markets have been the source of "multiple animal-to-human infections over the past 30 years".

People also need to take care to cook meat and reduce exposures to raw meat. Washing and cleaning meat properly is key, said Mishra at Columbia University.

Experts still do not know what animal the novel coronavirus originated from, though typically it will come from animals that normally would not have exposure to humans, experts say.

"At this time it is unclear how the virus spread from animal to person. It is also unclear how durable or transmissible the virus is," said Lighter, so experts can't yet draw conclusions regarding hygiene.

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