Social distancing and super-spreaders: Coronavirus lingo goes viral

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Social distancing, fourteen-ine, super-spreader: as the novel coronavirus balloons across the globe, new vocabulary associated with the illness is taking hold.

Here is some lingo—both new and old—linked to the pandemic.

COVID-19

The current epidemic first broke out in late December in the central Chinese city of Wuhan. It is caused by a new strain of the coronavirus.

The illness it causes in humans has been named COVID-19 for "coronavirus disease 2019" by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Barrier gestures

Used to describe the measures people can take to reduce the risk of infection.

Regular hand washing, coughing and sneezing into one's elbow and using a tissue only once are three signature barrier gestures recommended to prevent the spread of the virus.

Social distancing

People are also advised to carry out "social distancing" measures to minimise contact with other people to diminish the risk of contagion.

In countries across the globe, people have been advised against stop shaking hands and kissing to say hello—common greetings in many parts of Europe.

People are also advised to stay at least one metre away from others and avoid gatherings, including dining our or attending sports matches or concerts.

Super spreader

This refers to a person who has infected a large number of other people.

Unless protective measures such as isolation are taken, it is estimated that an infected person will transmit the illness to at least two or three other people.

The notion of "super spreader" is relatively old—the term was applied in the US during the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s.

Then as now, they are hard to pin down.

"It is possible that what we call 'super spreaders' do exist," said Eric Caumes, head of the infectious diseases service at the Pitie-Salpetriere hospital in Paris.

"The problem is we can not manage to find them".

Cluster

In medical terms, 'cluster' means several people infected in a specific place. In the case of an epidemic a cluster is a disease hotspot.

Fourteen-ine

This term stems from the word quarantine, which originally referred to the 40-day isolation period for people suspected of having the plague.

The COVID-19 incubation period—the time between infection and the appearance of symptoms—is estimated at between one and 14 days, according to the WHO.

Most governments around the world have imposed 14-day isolation periods for suspected cases.

But the WHO says infected people could still be contagious after they stop feeling sick and recommends isolation for at least two weeks after symptoms disappear.

Asymptomatic

A person who has contracted the [coronavirus](#) usually has a fever, [dry cough](#) and sometimes breathing difficulties.

But some remain asymptomatic, meaning they have no symptoms.

The risk of contracting COVID-19 when coming into contact with an asymptomatic person is low according to the WHO, because the illness is mainly spread via droplets which collect in the air when someone coughs or sneezes.

But it remains possible to catch the disease from someone who has only a light cough and does not feel ill.

Pandemic

An epidemic is declared when a [disease](#)—usually infectious—spreads in a particular region.

The term pandemic applies when it spreads at a global level, affecting at least two continents.

The WHO dubbed the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic on March 11.

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