[UPDATE - This article has recently been updated to reflect the new findings after the first version and second version of the article was released.]

FAQs 2019-nCoV
By Samitivej Hospital - Updated 30 January 2020

1. What is a coronavirus?
Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which cause diseases ranging from a simple cold (some seasonal viruses are coronaviruses) to more severe diseases such as MERS or SARS. The virus identified in China is a novel coronavirus. It has been referred to as 2019-nCoV.

2. What are the symptoms of respiratory infection caused by 2019-nCoV?
The main symptoms are fever and respiratory signs such as coughing or shortness of breath. In more severe cases, the disease can lead to serious lung infection and death.

3. Are there people at risk who may develop a severe form of the disease?
As with many infectious diseases, people with underlying chronic conditions (respiratory distress, frail people, elderly people, etc.) are at a higher risk.

4. What is the mode of transmission?
The first cases that were identified were people who had been to the Wuhan market (closed since 1 January 2020): the hypothesis of zoonosis (disease transmitted by animals) is therefore preferred. Human-to-human transmission has since been proven in China, Japan, Germany, and Vietnam. The evolution of knowledge in the coming weeks will allow us to learn more about the modes of transmission of this virus, its level of transmission, virulence, incubation period and the animals that can be carriers.

5. What is defined as a 'close contact' in the context of the 2019-nCoV epidemic?
Close contact means sharing the same location as a sick person experiencing symptoms (in the same home, hospital or boarding room) or having direct face to face contact (1-2 meters apart and without effective protective measures) with a sick person during a discussion, or when they cough or sneeze.

6. What if you have been in contact with a non-symptomatic person from China?
As of 30 January 2020, there have been several case reports supporting human-to-human asymptomatic transmission, but this has not yet been confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO). It is still premature to conclude that the virus can be transmitted from an asymptomatic patient, who has tested positive for the virus, to another person. If asymptomatic transmission is proven to be true, the current protocols which WHO and many countries' healthcare authorities use to screen and prevent the spread of the disease will be significantly less effective.

7. When WHO talks about animal sources, could this theoretically include cooked meat or fish, and all types of animals?
When meat is cooked, viruses are destroyed. Consumption of uncooked animal products, including milk and meat, poses a significant risk of infection by a wide variety of organisms that can cause disease in humans. Animal products that are cooked or pasteurized can be consumed, but they must also be carefully preserved to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked food.

8. What defines a 'case?'
According to WHO, a 'suspect case' is a patient with fever and cough requiring hospitalization, who has tested negative for any known pathogens which cause acute respiratory tract infections, and either: 1) has a history of travel to, or residence in, an affected area in China within the 14 days prior to symptom onset, or 2) is a healthcare worker working where patients with 2019-nCoV infection are located.

9. How is the diagnosis made?
The diagnosis is suspected upon the onset of signs of respiratory infection in a person returning from China in the 14 days prior to the onset of symptoms, in accordance with the case definition.

A specific biological test is required to confirm 2019-nCoV infection. A specimen will be collected and sent to a central laboratory designated by the Department of Disease Control. Results will take approximately 48 hours.

10. What treatments are available?
To date, no specific treatment has been identified for this new coronavirus; treatment is symptomatic.

11. Does the 2019-nCoV survive in an outdoor environment?
There is no scientific data for this virus to date. However, by analogy with other viruses of the same family, this virus is suspected to be able to remain infectious in an outdoor environment, from a few hours to a few days depending on the environment in which it is located. It is a virus wrapped and therefore by some aspects more fragile than other viruses.

Standard hygiene measures (hand washing, cleaning surfaces) are effective.

12. What is the contagiousness of the disease?
The degree of human-to-human spread outside of Hubei province remains unclear. The virus' reproductive number, R0, is estimated by WHO at 1.4–2.5. An R0 greater than 1 indicates that each case leads to more than 1 subsequent case, making it much more difficult to control.

13. How severe is the disease?
Among the cases reported to date, several patients have developed a severe form of the disease, some of whom have died. Available information suggests that the virus may cause symptoms similar to moderate influenza, but there may also be more severe symptoms. The disease can also progress over time. Patients with pre-existing chronic diseases such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, liver disease, and respiratory disease, as well as the elderly, appear to be more likely to develop severe forms of the disease. We still have a lot to learn about this virus, and we will continue to analyze all available information on existing and new cases.