

Here is our Coronavirus Topical Guide, which was released today. It includes clarified guidance that, at least for now, terms such as *the new coronavirus* or *the new virus* are OK on first reference.

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## Coronavirus Topical Guide

To help with coverage of the new coronavirus, called COVID-19, The Associated Press has prepared a guide based on the AP Stylebook and common usage in AP stories.

For more details, follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

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### coronavirus

A family of viruses, some of which can infect people and animals, named for crownlike spikes on their surfaces.

The viruses can cause the common cold or more severe diseases such as *SARS* (severe acute respiratory syndrome), *MERS* (Middle East respiratory syndrome) and *COVID-19*, the latter of which first appeared in late 2019 in Wuhan, China.

As of early 2020, phrasing like *the new coronavirus* or *the new virus* is acceptable on first reference for *COVID-19*, though stories should contain a mention of the disease's official name, accompanied by an explanation. *COVID-19* is also acceptable on first reference.

In stories, do not refer simply to *coronavirus* without the article *the*. Not: *She is concerned about coronavirus*. Omitting the is acceptable in headlines and in uses such as: *He said coronavirus concerns are increasing*.

Passages and stories focusing on the science of the disease require sharper distinctions.

*COVID-19*, which stands for *coronavirus disease 2019*, is caused by a virus named *SARS-CoV-2*. When referring specifically to the virus, *the COVID-19 virus* and *the virus that causes COVID-19* are acceptable. But, because *COVID-19* is the name of the disease, not the virus, it is not accurate to write *a new virus called COVID-19*.

*SARS* is acceptable on first reference for the disease first identified in Asia in 2003. Spell out *severe acute respiratory syndrome* later in the story.

*MERS* is acceptable on first reference. Spell out *Middle East respiratory syndrome* later in the story.

Symptoms of *COVID-19* can include fever, cough and breathing trouble. Most develop only mild symptoms. But some people, usually those with other medical complications, develop more severe symptoms, including pneumonia, which can be fatal.

Do not exaggerate the risks presented by any of the three diseases by routinely referring to them as *deadly*, *fatal* or the like.

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## **anti-**

Hyphenate most, but don't hyphenate words that have specific means of their own. For example: *antibiotic*, *antibody*, *antidote*, *antiseptic*.

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## **cancel, canceled, canceling, cancellation**

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## **Centers for Disease Control and**

## Prevention

Located in Atlanta, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. On first reference, use *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Precede with *national*, *federal* or *U.S.* if needed for clarity. *CDC* is acceptable on second reference and takes a singular verb.

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## contagious

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## data

The word typically takes singular verbs and pronouns when writing for general audiences and in data journalism contexts: *The data is sound*. In scientific and academic writing, plural verbs and pronouns are preferred.

Use *databank* and *database*, but *data processing* (n. and adj.) and *data center*.

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## death, die

Don't use euphemisms like *passed on* or *passed away* except in a direct quote.

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## diseases

Do not capitalize diseases such as *cancer*, *emphysema*, *leukemia*, *hepatitis*, etc. When a disease is known by the name of a person or geographical area identified with it, capitalize only the proper noun element: *Alzheimer's disease*, *Parkinson's disease*, *Ebola virus*, etc.

Avoid such expressions as: *He is battling cancer*. *She is a stroke victim*. Use

neutral, precise descriptions: *He has stomach cancer. She had a stroke.*

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## **epidemic, pandemic**

An *epidemic* is the rapid spreading of disease in a certain population or region; a *pandemic* is an *epidemic* that has spread worldwide. Use sparingly; follow declarations of public health officials. As of March 3, the COVID-19 outbreak had not been declared a pandemic.

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## **hand-washing**

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## **incubation period**

Time between infection and the appearance of signs or symptoms of an illness. The incubation period for the new virus is thought to be up to two weeks.

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## **isolation**

Separating sick people from healthy people to prevent spread of disease. For example, people with the infection are put in isolation in hospitals.

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## **National Institutes of Health**

This agency within the Department of Health and Human Services is the principal biomedical research arm of the federal government. *NIH* is acceptable on second reference. There are 27 institutes or centers, including the National Cancer Institute, the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the

National Institute of Mental Health.

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## **outbreak**

A sudden rise in cases of a disease in a particular place. For disease references, reserve for larger numbers of an illness, not a few cases.

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## **quarantine**

Restricting movement of healthy people who may have been exposed to an infection to see if they become ill. For example, the passengers on the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan were quarantined.

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## **risk**

Relative risk is the risk of something happening to one group compared with the risk of it happening to another. This is often expressed in a fraction or ratio in scientific studies. If there is no difference, the ratio is 1. For example, if a study finds that the relative risk of a group of smokers getting a disease is 1.5 compared with a group of nonsmokers, it means the smokers are 1.5 times — or 50% — more likely to develop the disease. But it doesn't say how likely it is that either group gets the disease. For that, you need absolute risk.

Absolute risk is the risk of something happening at all. For example, the nonsmoking group in the above example may have had a 4 in 100 chance of getting the disease, while the smokers had a 6 in 100 chance of getting a disease. Another example: A drug that extends life by 50% (a relative risk) sounds impressive, but that might mean living six months on average on a treatment versus four months without. Readers deserve both views of the results.

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# World Health Organization

The specialized health agency of the United Nations and is based in Geneva. It sets internationally accepted guidelines for treating diseases and coordinates responses to disease outbreaks globally. *WHO* is acceptable on second reference and takes a singular verb.

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Thank you,

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