

# THE LANGUAGE OF A PANDEMIC

---

As COVID-19 sweeps the globe, a new language has cropped up almost overnight. Here, **Comma Chameleon** takes a look at the terminology that's suddenly entered the popular lexicon...



**COMMA**  
CHAMELEON

# GLOSSARY

---

## THE VIRUS

---

**At-risk group:** People with an increased risk of severe illness or death if they contract the virus. For the novel coronavirus, at-risk groups include people over 60 years old, those with chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes or lung conditions, and those with weakened immune systems.

**Community transmission:** When a virus is detected in a person who doesn't know how they got it. This basically started happening as soon as the first person in the UK was diagnosed with the virus when they hadn't recently returned from abroad.

**Contact tracing:** A method for tracking the spread of the virus. When a person has been identified as infected, they are asked to generate a list of people they have come into contact with during the incubation period, identifying recent activities, outings and relationships, etc.

**Coronavirus:** A type of common virus that causes respiratory illness. There are many varieties of coronavirus.

**COVID-19:** A shortened version of Coronavirus Disease 2019, the name of the disease caused by the novel coronavirus that's currently sweeping the globe. Symptoms include fever, cough and shortness of breath.

**Direct/indirect transmission:** Direct contact transmission occurs when there is physical contact between an infected person and a non-infected person. Indirect transmission occurs when germs are spread through contact with contaminated surfaces or objects, such as door handles or taps.

**Epidemic:** The term given to an increased, often sudden, prevalence of a disease in a community.

# GLOSSARY

---

**Epidemiologist:** A public health expert who studies the spread, patterns, control and distribution of illnesses in a population.

**Mortality rate:** The percentage of people who die from an illness. For COVID-19, the overall mortality rate is estimated at 3.4%, although the limited testing being carried out on asymptomatic or mild cases may be skewing this to be higher than it actually is.

**Pandemic:** The term given to describe a situation when an illness is spreading widely and simultaneously in multiple geographical areas across the world. By the time the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, it has spread across 119 countries, with 118,000 infections and 4,300 deaths.

**R-naught, or R0:** A measure of how contagious a virus is, calculated as the average number of people likely to be infected by a single carrier. COVID-19 has an R-naught of 2.2, meaning each infected person will infect 2.2 others, on average.

**SARS-CoV-2:** The technical name for the 2019 novel virus that is currently causing havoc across the world. It is from the same family as the virus that causes SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome.

**Vulnerable people:** The group or groups of people thought to be particularly vulnerable to either contracting the disease, or dying from the disease if contracted.

# GLOSSARY

---

## THE MEASURES

---

**Flatten the curve:** The idea that appropriate social distancing measures can slow the spread of the virus, ensuring the NHS is not put under too much pressure at any one time.

**Herd immunity:** Resistance to the spread of a disease that happens when enough people in a population have or develop immunity, either through vaccination or by catching the disease. This is considered a risky prospect, and the UK Government quickly decided against it.

**Isolation:** People who are ill are isolated from those who are healthy. This will often happen in a hospital, where it is easier to treat and contain the virus, but can also be done in a person's own home, if the symptoms are not serious. Once a person is released from isolation, they do not pose an infection risk to others.

**Quarantine:** The government-ordered or self-imposed separation of an exposed person from the wider population, usually for the incubation period of the virus. COVID-19 is thought to have an incubation period of 14 days, and this is the current advice on quarantine length. If the person does not become ill or develop symptoms during the 14-day period, they are considered safe to resume regular activities.

**Social distancing:** Arguably the best way of containing the spread of the virus. Basically, it means maintaining distance from others, including avoiding public gathering places like schools, gyms, bars and restaurants, and staying at home as much as possible.

**Lockdown:** The closure of all but essential brick-and-mortar stores, businesses and schools. For example, supermarkets can stay open as they are needed to feed the nation, but hairdressers must close.

# GLOSSARY

---

## THE KEY ORGANISATIONS

---

**WHO:** The World Health Organization, based in Geneva, Switzerland, which directs the international response to global health threats.

**PHE:** Public Health England. The executive agency sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Care, which is tasked with protecting and improving the nation's health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities.

## WORK

---

**Key worker:** A person identified, through their occupation, as being vital to the continued running of the country. Among those considered key workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic are doctors, nurses, supermarket workers, postal workers and delivery drivers.

**Remote working:** The action of carrying out your work from somewhere that isn't the office where you are usually based.

**WFH:** Working from home. As remote working, but when the place you are working from is your own home.

**Essential travel:** When the only journeys you are allowed to undertake are those that are considered essential, such as supermarket trips.

## MISCELLANEOUS

---

**Panic buying:** The buying of large quantities of certain items, e.g. toilet roll, because of a fear of future shortages.