

SCIENCE 02.11.2020 07:08 PM

# Coronavirus Has a Name: The Deadly Disease Is Covid-19

The virus that causes it is SARS-CoV-2. (We didn't say they were *goodnames*.)



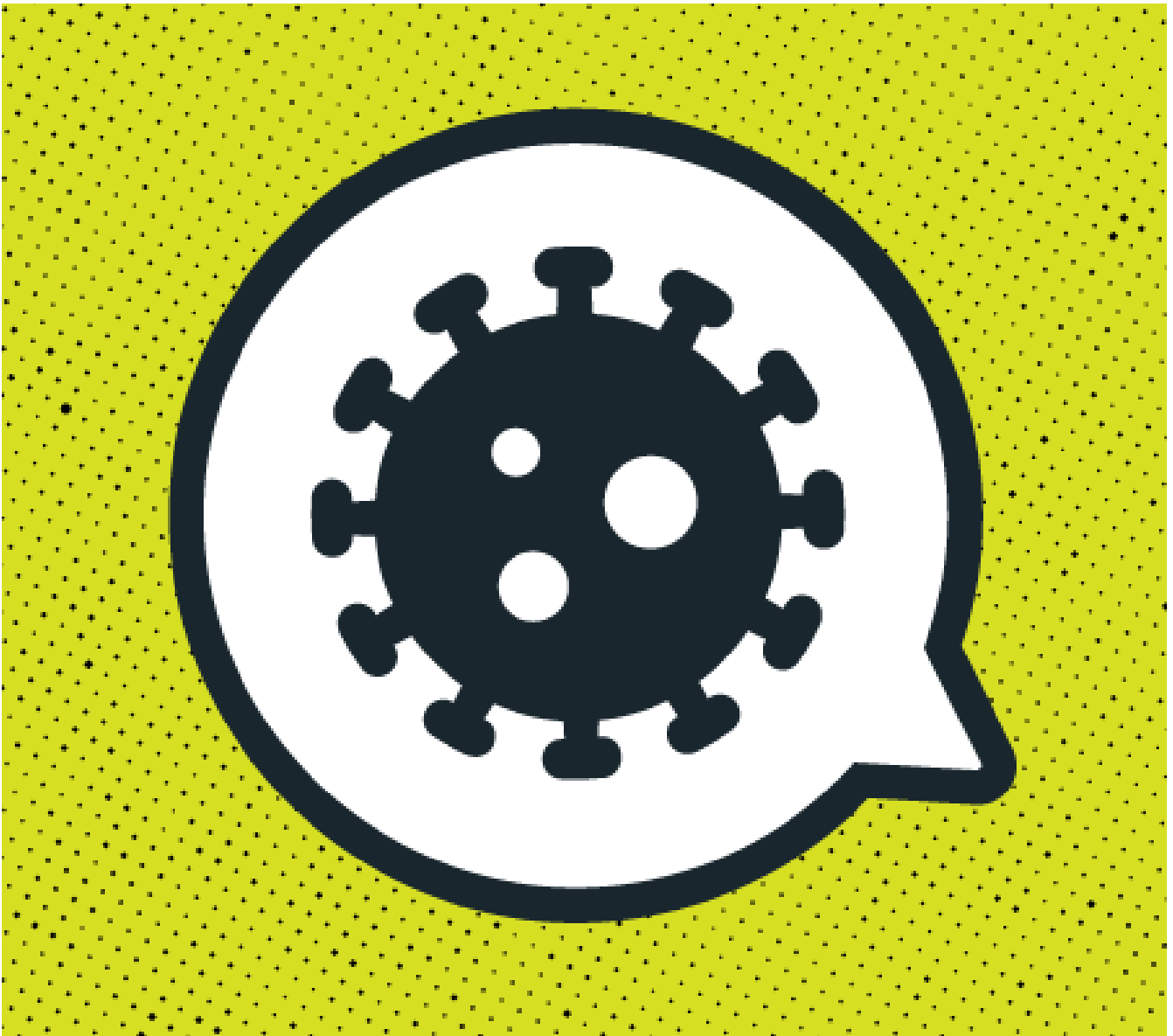
The naming of viruses is a serious matter. How people describe a disease and the people who have it can create or perpetuate dangerous stigmas. PHOTOGRAPH: JEFF PACHOUD/GETTY IMAGES

**INTEGRATED SYSTEMS EUROPE** is the biggest audio-video trade show in the world, and this year's iteration, happening right now in Amsterdam, was going pretty well for Norm Carson. He's president of a specialty AV gear company in Tempe, Arizona—it makes a nice HDMI cable with lots of adaptor jacks at one end—and the conference seemed fine, if perhaps more sparsely attended than usual. And then, around midday Tuesday, Carson's phone lit up. Call after call was streaming into his company's headquarters. Because Carson's company is called Covid, and as of Tuesday, so is the disease caused by that new coronavirus.

Per the World Health Organization, the unwieldy, serial-number-like moniker 2019-nCoV is no more. The disease that has infected more than 40,000 people around the world and killed more than 1,000 is now officially called Covid-19—CoronaVirus Disease, 2019. And per the Coronavirus Study Group of the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (in a preprint, so not peer reviewed, but likely to be cleared), the microbe itself is now called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2, or SARS-CoV-2.

Not much better? Sure, the new designations don't have the pith of a "SARS" or a "bird flu." They're certainly not great for Carson and Covid. "We make high-end wall plates and cables for the commercial market, and we've worked really hard to build our brand and build good products," Carson says. "So any time you're associated with a worldwide pandemic, I think it's something to be concerned about." Indeed; just ask the marketers at AB InBev, makers of Corona beer.

## **Ask WIRED**



### **What is a coronavirus?**

But disease nomenclature doesn't exist to make things easier on headline writers and Wikipedia editors. The naming of viruses is, to paraphrase the poet T. S. Eliot, a serious matter. How people describe a disease and the people who have it can create or perpetuate dangerous stigmas. Before the taxonomists got ahold of it, AIDS was unofficially called Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, or GRID—which managed to feed homophobic fears and demagoguery while minimizing that intravenous drug users and people who sought blood transfusions were also vulnerable to the disease. And the fight to discover and name both the virus (which eventually became Human Immunodeficiency Virus, or HIV) and the disease (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) tore apart the international virology community for decades.