

The coronavirus basics as of March 19, 2020.

Questions and Answers 3/19/20:

This information is evolving so rapidly that some of this info could be completely different by tomorrow.

This coronavirus is a virus known as "COVID-19" or "SARS-CoV-2."

If you know and love a healthcare worker (physician, surgeon, nurse, nurse practitioner, physician assistant, nurse anesthetist, lab technician, physical or occupational therapist, pharmacist, respiratory therapist, X-Ray technician, paramedic, counselor, receptionist...), the list could go on and on--if you know someone in any of these fields, this is YOUR chance to REALLY HELP US out and keep US safe and limit this overwhelming healthcare burden that is coming. Believe me when I say-it is coming.

1.) Is this serious? YES.

This virus can be deadly. From what I have read, the populations most at risk of dying are:

- People age 65+
- Anyone with a lowered immune system (example: cancer patients, people on immune suppression medications)
- People with other existing conditions such as diabetes, smoking, COPD, asthma, lung disease, cardiomyopathy, heart disease such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or history of heart attacks/artery disease and maybe you have a stent
- People who have had an organ transplant

These people seem to be the ones having the most severe symptoms that could lead to death although many people ages 20 to 54 will need hospitalizing.

2.) What is a virus?

A virus is not something you take an antibiotic for. There is no cure for a virus, it just has to run its course. Some viruses respond to antiviral medications; for example, we typically give Tamiflu to patients who have the flu (which is another type of virus). A virus is like a machine that must have a host (a human) in order to reproduce and multiply. A virus's ONLY goal is to replicate itself as much as it can. What's the best way to multiply a virus? Make it undetectable so it can spread to others without you knowing you are doing anything wrong. We don't know yet, but right now, we are being told you could have this virus for up to 2 weeks and feel completely normal before you have symptoms; HOWEVER, during this time, you are spreading the virus to EVERYONE you come in contact with.

3.) We've had swine flu and SARS in the past, why is this so different from those?

COVID-19 is totally different because it is so deadly. The swine flu was not nearly as lethal as this. People are needing ventilators because of this virus, and there are not enough ventilators to supply everyone who needs one at one time. THAT is why we are supposed to be staying at home, to SLOW DOWN the rate this virus spreads so the healthcare system has a chance to meet the needs. That is what "flattening the curve" means. If we can slow the spread down, maybe that will ALSO allow enough time for a medication or vaccine to be created to help.

4.) Do I really have to stay home?

YES. Stay home, it is the best thing to do at this time. Do not let anyone come over to your house. Not your grandchildren, not your best friend, not your neighbor's child, not your book club, not your bunco group EVEN if that person is "not sick." They could already be infected with this virus and not even know it. This is how we slow down the rate of how fast this virus spreads. If we all get sick at the same time, it will be far too much of a burden, and more than the

healthcare team will be able to handle. If it gets to that point, physicians will have to make a decision on who to treat and who is left to die. Not to mention we wouldn't even be able to have a funeral as we know it because it is too risky and unsafe.

5.) Can I get this from my mail?

We don't know, but at this time the CDC has not made a recommendation to avoid your mail. They are studying different surfaces to see how long the virus lives on different surfaces without a human. They think it may be hours to a few days. If you must handle your mail, wash your hands really well afterwards and don't touch your face.

6.) Is it ok if my grandchildren or grandparents come over?

No. No one should be at your house except you and whoever lives there.

7.) Is it ok to still meet with my LifeGroup?

No. No one should be at your house except you and whoever lives there. If Skype or FaceTime is an option--you could meet that way or set up group email or texting. Call and talk to people in the church. We have to check on each other and provide distant moral support during this awful time.

8.) How do people get this COVID-19?

This virus is spread human to human. If you don't come into contact with it (such as quarantining yourself inside your home with a no visitor rule), you won't get it. But if someone in your home leaves to go to the grocery store and comes into contact with an infected person (who may not even feel sick or have any symptoms yet), he or she just brought the virus home to you.

9.) How do I NOT get this COVID-19?

Do not come in contact with it. We have NO immunity to this virus. It is a NEW virus to humans. If you are exposed to it, you will very likely get it. Wash your hands frequently, do not touch your face (eyes, nose, mouth). Sanitize your surfaces frequently (anything you touch frequently such as light switches, door knobs, radio knobs, steering wheel, cabinet knobs, pantry door handle, the refrigerator handle, sink knobs, toilet handles, shower knob, your phone/iPad/lap top, etc). Minimize what you touch.

10.) Handwashing rules: please Google how to wash your hands appropriately.

Wash your hands for 20 seconds, and pay special attention to washing your fingers and thumbs. Here is a link to make sure you are washing your hands correctly. Don't laugh or be arrogant, click on the link. CLEARLY people's hand washing is ineffective or else we wouldn't be dealing with this right now. Don't worry if you don't have antibacterial soap--this is not a bacteria we are dealing with, it is a virus. Just soap, water, and friction is all you need. Hand sanitizer with 60% alcohol is the next best option, but make sure the sanitizer hasn't been out of date for several years--if so, the alcohol has likely evaporated.

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>

11.) I live with several people; do I need to stay 6 feet away from my family?

Yes, ideally. If anyone in your home is having to leave to make grocery runs or go to the doctor, he or she is taking a risk of bringing this HIGHLY contagious virus back to YOU and your home.

13.) What do I do if I run out of toilet paper?

Toilets are right beside a shower. It will be ok. Just buy what you need so manufactures can have a chance to restock the supply in a manageable supply/demand time frame. If everyone keeps stock piling the toilet paper, they can't make it faster than it is selling.

14.) My teenagers are asking if a friend can come over. Is that ok?

No. The only people that should be in your home is people who live there. Tell them to Skype or FaceTime or TikTok their friends so they can stay connected.

15.) I have a runny nose and sore throat, and I usually go to the doctor for this.

Try to wait it out and give it some time OR try telehealth or virtual medicine--most insurances offer this. Do not go to a medical facility unless it is essential to your health. This is not the time to take your child for a well-child visit or a sports physical. This is not the time for a routine eye exam, mammogram, Pap smear, or dental cleaning. This is not the time to go to the doctor because your knee has been aching for 2 months. Many facilities are cancelling any elective procedure--basically, if it can wait, let's wait and reschedule to a safer time. This is not the time to be at the hospital unless it's absolutely necessary.

16.) I have an appointment next week with my doctor for my diabetes check, what do I do?

Call your doctor. Most clinics at this time are sending in a refill for at least a month of medications. Many facilities are having telephone visits. Contact your doctor's office and ask what your options are. If they say you have to be seen, ask them what precautions they are taking to keep your risk of exposure as low as possible. Personally, we are telling patients to wait in their cars, and we will call them when we are ready for them to be seen.

17.) If I'm scheduled for a colonoscopy next month, can I still go?

No, this needs to be rescheduled to a safer time. ANY elective procedure needs to wait.

18.) I feel depressed.

This is naturally going to happen. Fortunately, there are apps and resources we can use to FaceTime a therapist/counselor from our couch. It is important to stay healthy mentally and this is where social connection is going to be vital. Pick up the phone and call people. Face time, text, Skype. Write letters to nursing home residents and try to spread love and kindness. At this time, the CDC has not said anything about mail being unsafe, just wash your hands well before writing a letter and after handling your mail. This could change tomorrow, but as of today, it's ok--just be smart and wash your hands.

19.) I'm supposed to go get my hair cut and/or colored this weekend, can I still go?

No. Cancel your appointment. Remember, you aren't going to be leaving your home so if you have some grey hairs or dark roots, no one will see you anyway. If you are that self-conscious about your looks, wear a wig while you are Face Timing or using Skype. Bring out last year's Halloween costume if you want.

20.) Dave Ramsey said this is just a virus and that the media is just making a big deal about it and that I have nothing to worry about.

I love Dave Ramsey's solid, scriptural money advice, but he did not go to medical school, and he is not on the front lines examining and treating these patients. His job is to give financial advice. And if no one can go to work, yes we will all have financial problems, but right now we just need to focus on our health.

21.) Will spring-breakers bring this back with them?

Yes. Be cautious and do not let anyone in your house that doesn't live there. The people on Spring Break have likely been around multiple infected people in close contact and have not been careful about following the recommendations such as hand washing and not eating/drinking after each other. Most people on Spring Break are the younger population who think they are invincible, and unfortunately, they really don't understand the major impact and role THEY play in the spread of this disease. It is YOUR job as a parent to educate these children/teenagers/young adults. It is everyone's responsibility in society to do your part and spread awareness.

22.) Can I shop online? Is it ok to open my mail?

If shopping online, just buy the essentials. The CDC has not said we cannot receive packages--just wash your hands and do not touch your face, eyes, nose, mouth. Wash hands before eating. Do not touch your phone while you are eating.

23.) What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

-Cough

OR

-Fever (temp of 100.4 or higher) (99.5 is NOT a fever. And please don't be one of those people who say, "My normal temp is 97 so 99 is a fever for me." No it's not, and quit saying that.)

OR

-Shortness of breath

These symptoms mimic A LOT of other illnesses such as the flu. From what I have read and seen from people who have had and recovered from COVID-19, symptoms seem to start out gradually as a common head cold (runny nose, head congestion, nasal congestion) then start to improve after a few days. Then the patient develops flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, body aches, no energy); then it starts to get better, and then the pneumonia sets in, and you may start to have shortness of breath. It sounds like symptoms last from 2-3 weeks or longer in adults. In children and healthy teenagers, they may not have many of these symptoms at all other than just a cold or fever.

24.) I am having symptoms of coronavirus, COVID-19-- what do I do?

CALL your health care provider and they will be able to direct your next step. Do not leave your home. Quarantine yourself to one room in the home such as the bedroom. Have a family member leave your food at the door. If you are able to control the fever (from what I have read, it sounds like Tylenol MAY be preferred over ibuprofen) and other symptoms with things like rest, fluids, cough syrup...you do NOT HAVE to go to the doctor. At this time, March 19, 2020, we have no medicines or other tools in our tool box to help you. This may and hopefully will change tomorrow. They are working on developing antiviral medications, but at this time, we have nothing to give you unless you meet the criteria for hospitalization.

At this time, supplies are SO limited that we are not even able to test for this virus except for a very limited patient population that meets the testing criteria. However, this is hopefully going to change very soon (maybe even by tomorrow.) Keep that in mind if you are checking the daily updates on TN Dept. of Health (they give a case count update every afternoon around 2:00 pm). I promise you there are WAY more cases than are being reported because of the limited testing supplies and the overwhelming influx of tests at the lab.

25.) I have COVID-19--do I need to go to the ER?

No, do NOT go to the ER unless you are having difficulty breathing, chest pain/pressure, new confusion or difficulty or inability to arouse, or bluish coloring around lips. In general....the ER is one of the most unsafe places you can be right now. If it is essential to your health that you have to be seen right then, by all means go to the ER. But if there is ANY way to avoid going--stay home and call your healthcare provider for guidance. This is NOT the time to be going for a Pap smear or annual well-person physical. You are risking your life to go to a healthcare facility unless it is absolutely necessary.

"Normal" is gone for now, hopefully not forever, but probably at least for a few months. We have to make these sacrifices to save lives and reduce the healthcare burden. Pray, pray, pray. Check on your healthcare workers, let them know they are thought of and appreciated. Check on your neighbors and fellow church members. Stay connected. Spread love and kindness instead of germs.

Remember, "Finding the Healer is more important than finding the healing." This was our medical mission trip motto in 2012, and this is the perfect adage for us to share with others during this time and beyond.

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