Don’t Panic and Wash Your Hands: What You Need to Know About The Coronavirus

Karl Steinberg, MD, CMD, HMDC, shares facts about the new virus and how you can protect yourself and your older loved ones.

Worries always spread when there is a new virus. That certainly is true of the coronavirus disease named COVID-19 by the World Health Organization (WHO). First identified in the People’s Republic of China, this highly infectious virus has spread to many countries, including the United States. Instead of panicking, learn the facts to find out how you can protect your loved ones and yourself.

- Coronavirus disease is an infectious disease caused by a recently discovered coronavirus. This virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, late last year.
- The symptoms include fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, or diarrhea. These symptoms, according to WHO, are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people may become infected but don’t develop any symptoms and don’t feel sick.
- Most people recover without treatment. However, about one in six individuals who get COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and has difficulty breathing. Older people and people with medical problems such as heart disease or diabetes are at greater risk of getting seriously ill.
- COVID-19 can spread from person to person through droplets released in the air during coughing or sneezing. It also can be spread by contact with objects or surfaces that droplets have landed on.

What You Can Do

- Practice good hygiene such as frequently and thoroughly washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based sanitizing gels.
- Seek immediate help if you experience symptoms of COVID-19. Don’t try to self-treat with over-the-counter or herbal products.
- Avoid smoking.
- Stay home for 14 days if you feel ill or have symptoms.
- Talk to your practitioner if you have questions. Don’t listen to rumors or unfounded information about preventive measures and cures related to COVID-19.

For More Information

- World Health Organization, Q&A on Coronaviruses (COVID-19), https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses

Questions to Ask Your Practitioner

- What is my risk or a loved one’s risk of getting COVID-19?
- Should my loved one or I wear a mask or other face cover if we go out in public?
- What is the best way to stay safe in public locations or gatherings?
- Are there different stories out there about possible treatments for COVID-19? How do I know what is true?

Can my loved one or I get COVID-19 from a pet?
Is it safe to receive a package from China or another area where COVID-19 is actively spreading?
Is it safe to fly domestically or to take public transportation?

Regularly and thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your mouth or nose. Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough. And stay home if you feel sick.
Stay six feet away from anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
Disinfect surfaces/objects the sick person has touched.
If you or your loved one has the symptoms of COVID-19, don’t panic — but do contact a practitioner immediately, first by phone.
There is no vaccine to date, nor is there any available specific antiviral medicine to prevent or treat COVID-19. However, those affected should receive care to relieve their symptoms.
Antibiotics are not effective in preventing or treating COVID-19. These drugs only work on bacterial infections, and COVID-19 is caused by a virus.
To slow the spread of the disease and protect vulnerable residents, nursing homes across the nation have implemented visitor restrictions. To stay in touch with your loved ones, consider using technology if possible.

Feeling stressed and anxious about this virus is natural. However, get the facts and talk to your practitioner, who is an important partner and can provide the information, help, and support you need.