

### **Coronavirus COVID-19 Questions & Answers, 3-20-20**

Mayor Jim Thornton & Dr. Ken Horlander, LaGrange Physician specializing and an expert in pulmonary and critical care medicine at Emory Clark-Holder Clinic. He has been treating patients suffering with COVID-19.

**Question:** What is the coronavirus COVID-19 and why is it so dangerous?

**Answer:** The coronaviruses are a group of different viruses some of which can actually cause the common cold. One of the viruses mutated years back and created the virus SARS. The current one is very similar to SARS and it is now called SARS-Coronavirus-2. We've been calling the illness COVID-19 because it was discovered in 2019. As everyone is aware it started in Wuhan, China. This virus can be in animals and humans and there's belief that this one originated in bats. There is still research going on about that. It's very contagious and easily caught. In addition to being easily transmitted, it can cause a more severe illness in a small percentage of patients and can lead to needing care in the ICU and there can be even be deaths from this.

**Question:** What are the symptoms and what do people experience if they are affected and it becomes one of the more serious cases?

**Answer:** Its symptoms are similar to the flu. If someone comes into the clinic with symptoms we test the person for the flu. 99% will get a fever. It doesn't mean that they have fever in the beginning. One study found 44% had an initial fever but within a few days of getting ill, 99% ended up having a fever. At the time of testing half had no symptoms. Other symptoms include fatigue, dry cough, anorexia (or not feeling like eating), body and muscle aches. A smaller percentage will have shortness of breath. Some will have sputum production but most will have dry cough. If someone has shortness of breath that is a little more worrisome. That brings up red flags and if it's bad we may have them go to the Emergency Room.

**Question:** When should someone be tested for coronavirus COVID-19? What is your advice if someone might have been exposed or if they have display some of these symptoms.

**Answer:** The answer to this questions is evolving on a daily basis. Part of it is that there has been a lack of testing ability. They are still creating test kits and the question is do you have enough or not. Right now through the hospital and through my clinic is that if you've had a contact that doesn't mean you are guaranteed to get it. Instead of testing, push social distancing. Stay 6 feet from others. Better not to touch. I don't agree with the tapping feet b/c you are still close. If you start to show symptoms, get into contact with your doctor or clinic. Discuss what is going on with that provider and they will decide what to do. If someone doesn't have the flu or strep throat and they are showing significant symptoms then we may recommend testing.

**Question:** We've heard the terms social distancing and flattening the curve. Are these truly effective in preventing a bigger outbreak?

**Answer:** I do think it's effective. Diligent handwashing is important. If you think about it when I walked into this room I touched the doorknob. Think about how many people touched the door knob before

me. Has it been wiped down? Probably not. So I need to make an effort not to touch my face. They call it the T-zone, across the eyes down through the nose and mouth. Attempt to not to touch yourself on the face. If you wash your hands pretty frequently, there's a good chance you've gotten rid of the virus on your hands so if you touch your face after washing thoroughly, there isn't any virus on your hands. It's actually the #1 thing. Washing is the #1 thing and has been the #1 thing for all the other infections out there that we've dealt with over the years. Protecting others is #2. That means coughing or sneezing into your elbow which does a better job than your hand in the spread of the virus. #3 Avoid touching the face. #4 Avoid crowds. The 6 foot rule comes from a study that found sneezing droplets tend to spray 3 feet maybe further depending on the strength of the cough. If you are six feet away, then you are probably safe. If you stand next to someone and you both put your arms out – if you can touch each other, you're probably too close together. #5 Cleaning and disinfecting areas. For more information on disinfecting your home go to [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-your-home.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-your-home.html). If you disinfect surfaces you can kill 99.9% of the virus. One thing that I'm asked a lot is should I put on a mask if I'm well and I plan to walk through the community. There have been studies looking into this and they've found that it really isn't beneficial. For regular masks, the air is coming around the outside and is not being filtered. The virus can go around the mask. If someone is coughing and they are wearing a mask it does help to protect everyone around them.

**Question:** If someone has COPD or another breathing issue, what sort of complications will this create?

**Answer:** The data that is out there shows that people that are older or have medical comorbidities such as COPD or diabetes or etc., illnesses, that they are managing. I don't think that includes hypertension. They are at an increased risk if they get really sick. The percentage of getting really sick from this is not high but still a low percentage of people who get sick are going to get very sick. The data shows that the ones with these illnesses and are older are at a higher risk of getting really sick and possibly dying. I believe we've had 10 deaths in Georgia. We haven't had any deaths in LaGrange. The worry is that if you have a respiratory illness like COPD you will be at a higher risk.

**Question:** If someone has one of those situations, would you suggest them to stay out of work to avoid potential exposure?

**Answer:** This would be a personal choice. Even COPD has different levels – mild, moderate, severe, etc. Our personal experience in LaGrange is that the ones who've gotten really sick don't usually have COPD or respiratory illness. In America, there are some people who are infected that are relatively young and don't have any existing illnesses. You can be in your 40's. That data is starting to come out in the news. It's risky for the younger people too.

**Question:** We are getting into allergy season. What effect does it have on COVID-19?

**Answer:** I'm worried that we will have more people coming into the hospital with significant symptoms that are coming in but it's related to allergies. If there is any shortness of breath they should reach out to their doctor or primary care physician?

**Question:** What type of cough do you get with COVID-19? Do you get a headache or swollen lymph nodes? Is there a way to distinguish the symptoms of COVID-19?

**Answer:** I would have to say no. We aren't seeing a lot of lymph node swelling. We are seeing sore throats and a dry cough. Headache is not specific for COVID-19, but some do have it.

**Question:** Are heart patients more vulnerable?

**Answer:** Heart patients aren't more vulnerable to catch the virus but patients with an increased risk with stressing out system and having a stress related heart attack.

**Question:** Is there anything you have learned about this disease from treating the patients here local?

**Answer:** We have a group of patients who have had symptoms but have been ruled out. We've had negative test results. We have 2 in the hospital and 2 in the community. 4 total that I know of. At this point the people who we are testing are the people with illness but it doesn't mean it's severe. The majority of patients are not that ill. These are the ones who did show significant symptoms and were tested. We want to instill the seriousness of this but you also don't want people to get too panicked. There is a fine line. In our community we did get someone who was very ill from this. If you are in the small percentage who gets sick and in the smallest percentage of that in getting very sick, it is possible that you get the ARDS pattern, Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome. You may require a ventilator to help you breathe.

**Question:** Does warmer weather help prevent the spread of COVID-19?

**Answer:** We don't know but we are still hopeful that warmer weather will help reduce the spread of COVID-19. The common cold and flu tend to go away in spring and summer but then again H1N1 didn't go away completely. We are hopeful it will diminish it.

**Question:** What complications are there with hypertension?

**Answer:** Hypertension is probably not affected much by this virus. It's not a comorbidity issue to be the most concerned about. The worst ones like COPD or even diabetes that affects the immune system. People should be checking their blood pressure and managing it with their physician.

**Question:** Is it safe to give blood?

**Answer:** The likelihood that someone would get the coronavirus through blood is highly unlikely but we are still learning about this virus.

**Question:** 80% of COVID-19 patients have relatively mild symptoms. What happens to that 80%? What are their symptoms and would there be lingering issues or permanent damage?

**Answer:** Please keep in mind this is evolving and we continue to learn more about this virus every day. At this point we don't think there are any lingering effects for the people who have recovered, especially the 80% who didn't get very sick. I heard recently that 85,000 people at this point are considered recovered. Please remember anyone can have COVID-19 even if they don't have symptoms. We are still looking into the possibility that people are immune from COVID-19 after they have it. Some experts believe there will be some immunity similar to the flu shot.

**Question:** Do you have any recommendations or guidance for the government, businesses or citizens to help protect against COVID-19?

**Answer:** When something like this happens with more and more people getting sick, social distancing and closing more buildings off to the public to help prevent the spread of the virus may not stop the spread but it does help in lowering the peak of the curve. The spread of the virus will linger as people are still spreading but as we lower the curve we also give experts who are trying to create a vaccine or medication some extra time to work on this. I personally agree that it's important to promote social distancing to help prevent this virus from peaking too high.

**Question:** Has the Georgia medical community begun to research or monitor the spread of this disease?

**Answer:** I do know the CDC and GA Department of Health are watching. They have sent experts out to monitor. I am not up on all they are doing.

**Question:** Should pregnant women be especially concerned?

**Answer:** The mother would be at the same risk as anyone else. The information I have suggest that it doesn't spread to the baby while in the uterus, and it's not in breast milk either. The risk will be highest with the mother's touching and secretions to the baby once he/she is born.

**Question:** We've heard a lot about 14 days. If someone does test positive for the coronavirus, will they go 14 days back to see who that person has been in contact with or is it 14 days moving forward to isolate the person? What exactly is the 14 day window?

**Answer:** Within 14 days you should have gotten some symptoms if you came into contact with someone who was infected with COVID-19, usually it's with seven days but it can be within 14 days. If you haven't seen any symptoms within 14 days, then you are okay to come out of self-quarantine. We are still asking people to do the social distancing and washing, etc.

**Question:** Can I go to the doctor and get tested if I am concerned that I have COVID-19?

**Answer:** At this time Emory, WellStar, the CDC & the Department of Health are all recommending you NOT get tested b/c you feel you may have come into contact with someone with COVID-19. If you come into the ER, (and we are not recommending you come to the ER), because you feel like you display symptoms and you don't know what's going on, most ERs will take a look at you and if they feel you have symptoms like COVID-19 they will test you for flu or strep throat first. The chances that you have these illnesses and COVID-19 at the same time are extremely low. So if you test positive for the flu or strep throat, then that's what you've got. If you are well enough, then you are treated at home. Getting into the hospital is not mandatory when someone tests positive for the coronavirus. Our goal is to get people home. If they are well enough, we want them to go home. There are places one can go to get tested. It's dependent on the practitioner who you are seeing to determine if you should get tested. There are laboratories doing these tests including LabCorp and Quest that have testing ability. Getting test kits has been an issue but there has been a drive to increase the availability of tests. Keep in mind things may change in the near future. If you don't have symptoms, you could get a false negative test. It doesn't mean you don't have it if the test comes back negative. If you think you should self-quarantine,

then please self-quarantine. If you have symptoms and you're not that sick, then self-quarantine. If you are sick and you are concerned,

**Answer:** Absolutely call ahead and please contact your doctor too if possible. Call the clinic and talk to them because they may be able to help you from home. Going out into the community puts you at risk for contracting the virus.

**Question:** What is your take on the possible drugs coming out that can possibly treat this virus or the symptoms?

**Answer:** Nothing has proven to benefit. Everything is still under investigation and in studies. I would suggest you work with your physician.

**Final Thoughts by Dr. Horlander:**

Social distancing and handwashing is extremely important. Don't go to the ER if you think have COVID-19 unless you are very sick. You are opening yourself up to illness. The ER will be busy and you may have to wait a long time. It's better to go to a local healthcare provider and talk to them. If you did get tested at the clinic, they will probably tell you to self-quarantine. Consider yourself positive until you get back a negative. If you have symptoms avoid going around anyone. If you test positive, you need to be home away from everyone including your family. Please do a lot of washing. If you're sick please continue self-quarantine until a few days after you're feeling better.