COVID-19: Facts and Fiction

The best thing you can do during uncertain times is seek out reliable sources of information. That applies to the COVID-19 outbreak, so here are health alerts that we receive from our doctors, as well as myths about coronavirus.

Q: Is COVID-19 like a bad flu?
A: While it is true that the symptoms are similar (fever, dry cough, shortness of breath), there are very important differences. For instance, the mortality rate appears to be higher - the average flu season mortality rate is 0.1%, whereas COVID-19 is estimated to be much higher.

Q: Does COVID-19 only affect old people?
A: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advised that people who are 65 and older are considered at “higher risk” of experiencing a severe case of COVID-19. However, people who have underlying health conditions are also at risk - these include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and lung disease. Statistics from the Florida State Emergency Operations Center showed that as of April 12, 2020, there were nearly 1,400 cases among people age 15-24, 3,000 cases among people age 25-34 and 3,000 cases among people age 35-44.

Also, due to the contagiousness of the virus, it is essential that all of us to try to stem the spread of the disease by practicing good health habits like washing your hands, not touching your face and social distancing, and wearing a mask when outdoors and in contact with people.
Q: Should I get tested? How?

A: Call your doctor or your County Health Department if you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and symptoms, such as a dry cough or difficulty breathing. Other symptoms may include headache, sore throat and diarrhea. NOTE: We are actively screening all patients and visitors at UHealth facilities. Please arrive early to your appointment time to allow time for these screening protocols. When you arrive for your appointment, look for signs that will direct you where to go.

At this time, doctors are only testing people for the virus if they meet certain criteria. If you are concerned that you may have COVID-19, the best thing to do is to stay home and call your primary care doctor or an urgent care center. They will instruct you as to what you should do next.

Q: Can my kids get COVID-19?

A: There is evidence that although children may get milder forms of COVID-19, they are just as likely to contract the disease and can still spread the virus. Symptoms reported in children include fever, runny nose, cough, vomiting and diarrhea.

Q: Do face masks protect me from the coronavirus?

A: According to the CDC, disposable paper masks do not protect you against the coronavirus. But, they do suggest that people wear them if they are ill in order to protect those around them. However, it is better to wear a face mask out in public then not to wear it.

As to specialty face masks such as N95s, experts request that people not buy them so there is not a shortage for medical professionals who are taking care of COVID-19 patients.
Recently, the CDC recommended that people wear cloth face coverings in public places such as grocery stores and pharmacies where social distancing is difficult. The CDC now says that fabric masks or cloth face coverings (scarf or bandana) might help slow the spread of the virus. Cloth masks should not be used on children under the age of 2, anyone who has breathing problems, or who is incapacitated or unable to remove a mask without help. To learn safe ways to wear and clean fabric masks, click here.

**Q: Will spraying chlorine or alcohol all over your body kill the coronavirus?**

**A:** No, it will not, plus it can cause severe irritation to your skin. The best way to protect yourself from the virus is to wash your hands with soap and water (or use hand sanitizer) and clean surfaces with alcohol or a 1% solution of chlorine if appropriate.

**Q: Am I more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 at Chinese establishments?**

**A:** No, you can't get the illness from Chinese businesses or from packages mailed from China. Although the virus was first reported in China, a person’s ethnicity does not make them any more likely to have COVID-19.

**Q: Are patients who use ACE inhibitors and ARBs at high risk of severe infection?**

**A:** Not necessarily. Dr. Carlos Alfonso, an interventional cardiologist at the University of Miami Health System, says that there is not enough data to say that patients taking an ACE inhibitor or ARB are at more at risk. "Based on multiple professional societies, including the American College of Cardiology and the
American Heart Association, the recommendation is for our patients to continue taking their medications and to not stop their medications," he says. "They should if they're considering stopping, discuss it with their physicians first. But there is a clear benefit in our cardiovascular patients to continue with their medications for their heart disease."

Q: Will taking Ibuprofen worsen COVID-19 symptoms?
A: Both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the US Food and Drug Administration say that there is currently no evidence that ibuprofen and other NSAIDs make COVID-19 symptoms worse. Stop taking the medication if your symptoms get worse. Speak to your health care provider if you have any concerns.

Q: Can COVID-19 spread through cigarette smoke?
A: There is currently no evidence to suggest that the virus can be transmitted through second-hand smoke. Theoretically, if you stand close to an infected person exhaling from a cigarette or vaping, you could inhale respiratory droplets from that person, which could cause you to become infected with the virus.

Q: Are smokers at higher risk for catching COVID-19?
A: There is not yet enough verifiable data to know for certain if smokers have an increased risk of contracting the virus. However, it has been well documented that smoking is hazardous to health and leads to diseases that compromise immunity and damage the lungs, both of which increase your risk of severe disease.

Q: Does the pneumonia vaccine protect me from COVID-19?
A: No. Vaccines against pneumonia (and influenza or flu) do not protect you against COVID-19. Scientists are working to develop a vaccine for the new COVID-19 virus,
but it will likely be many months before a safe vaccine is approved. In the meantime, certain individuals do benefit by getting vaccinated against respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia or influenza. Speak with your health care provider to find out if you are a candidate for these vaccines.

Q: Is it safe to eat takeout food during the pandemic?

A: The current word from the CDC and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is that the virus is not transmitted in food, but could be transmitted on food. Meaning, if the cook preparing your food happens to have the virus and coughs or sneezes on your food, you could become infected, though it’s not likely. You can still take precautions to protect your health. First, order curbside pick-up or delivery from restaurants you know and trust – those that practice good sanitation in the best of times. Stick with cooked versus raw foods. When you bring the food home, wash your hands before eating and don’t eat straight from the takeout container. Dispose of or recycle the bag and container and place the food in your own container. Since heat destroys the virus, if you don’t mind the hassle, you can reheat the food for about 30 minutes in an oven at about 167 degrees. According to information from the WHO, freezing temperatures don’t kill the SARS coronavirus, but heat (about 133 degrees for 15 minutes) does. Basically, heat the food through in the oven or bring it to a boil on the stovetop for about 15 minutes.

Q: Can I get COVID-19 from my pet?

A: Current evidence suggests that human-to-human transmission is the primary means of infection. Some animals have become infected through close contact with infected humans. It is not yet known if pets or other animals can spread the disease. Though unlikely, it’s possible you could get the virus from petting a dog or cat, then touching your face, if the pet owner has the virus. Avoid petting other animals for now or wash your hands thoroughly after petting animals.
How to talk to kids about COVID-19

“Even at age two and three, they’re going to pick up their cues from their parent; so, I want to put pressure on parents to behave well,” says Dr. Alan Delamater. Read more.