A Note From the President

Hi Kate,

The Coronavirus epidemic may soon be declared a global pandemic. The best sources for up-to-date information remain the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Recently, we received a few questions from our supporters, so we turned to a few reliable resources for more information.

How worried should I be?

The answer varies by where you live and how many cases are around you. This map from Johns Hopkins University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering follows Coronavirus cases across the world.

Tom Inglesby, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security and an expert in infectious disease, pandemics, and public health preparedness, puts the latest numbers into perspective and shares his thoughts on the global public health response.

"It's important to know that in every outbreak like this, the most serious cases get recognized first. They're the ones that are sickest in the hospital, including people who die from the illness. There is always going to be a skew toward seeing those people first. But we know, at least from past outbreaks—and we have every reason to believe in this outbreak—that there is a wide range of illness and that in this case, the majority of people who are infected with this novel Coronavirus seem to have mild illness and full recovery. It is a small fraction of the people who are getting severe or critical illness or dying from it. And we know during every new outbreak, over time we're going to see many milder or even completely asymptomatic cases as part of the larger tally. And what that will do is it will show us that the case fatality rate will likely be much lower."

In this piece, Amesh Adalja, MD, a physician at Johns Hopkins, predicts that the Coronavirus is here to stay; and we should expect seasonal outbreaks. Dr. Adalja said the new respiratory infection will likely cause annual outbreaks, with most cases mild and "flu-like." He added, however, that the assumption should be that containment of the Coronavirus will fail in the U.S.

How do I protect myself?

The CDC advises that the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus.
However, as a reminder, the CDC also recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of all respiratory viruses, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

The virus is thought to spread from person to person through respiratory droplets emitted by coughing or sneezing. There's currently no evidence that the virus is airborne -- meaning, for instance, it doesn't travel across a large room. People of all ages can be infected with the virus, but older people and those with pre-existing medical conditions are especially vulnerable to severe complications.

How effective is hand sanitizer in preventing Coronavirus?
This article in the Washington Post advises that these alcohol-based hand sanitizers can provide a level of protection, but the alcohol within them evaporates fast and so does its protections. So, the application of the sanitizer you just used will likely kill the germs from the doorknob you just touched. However, if five minutes later, you touch another surface that is contaminated – you may not be protected.

Should I wear a mask?
Neither agency has come out with a recommendation to wear masks as a preventive measure. In this article about lessons learned from the SARS epidemic, the WHO has acknowledged that wearing masks might be useful if you're sick, to prevent you from infecting others by sneezing or coughing into somebody's face. However, they add "a mask that is used to stop getting an infection is sometimes not very effective because people take it off to eat, many times they are worn improperly (and) if they get wet and somebody sneezes on that mask it could pass through. So, there is really not a lot of evidence (to support wearing masks)."

Most of the data suggesting that wearing a mask can help prevent infections are instances within institutionalized health-care settings, where there are trained personnel and other infection control measures in place.

What if I think I have the Coronavirus?
Confirmed cases report symptoms ranging little to no symptoms to people being severely ill and dying. Symptoms can include fever, cough and shortness of breath. The CDC reports that symptoms of Coronavirus may appear in as few as two days or as long as 14 days after exposure. They also recommend these steps for people who suspect that they may have the flu or the Coronavirus infection:
- Stay home except to get medical care.
- Separate yourself from other people in your home.
- Call ahead before visiting your doctor.
- Wear a face mask to avoid infecting others.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with your elbow.
- Wash your hands.
- Avoid sharing household items and clean surfaces that are commonly shared.

Seek medical care immediately if your illness is getting worse (for example, if you are having trouble breathing). Call your healthcare provider ahead of time and tell them if you have been exposed to someone with the Coronavirus or have traveled to an area where there is an outbreak. This will help the healthcare provider's office take steps to keep other people from getting infected.

Regards,

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