

PROTECTING YOURSELF AGAINST COVID-19: THE NEW CORONAVIRUS FACT SHEET

LENGTH: 19 MINUTES

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

COVID-19 has become a global pandemic and all employees need to understand their role in preventing its spread. This program stresses the importance of good hygiene and social distancing as the primary ways the general public can reduce the spread of the virus. It also shows examples of frequent handwashing and the disinfecting of commonly touched items in various home, office and workplace settings and emphasizes the importance of not touching our face with our hands. Although vaccines are available now, it is still important to follow these safe practices to avoid spreading the illness.

After watching this program, the viewer will have a good understanding of the signs and symptoms of a COVID-19 infection, know when to seek medical attention and when not to, understand the importance of social distancing and self-isolation and be able to put into practice the best methods to prevent the spread of the virus at home, in the workplace and in their community.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

After watching the program, the participant will be able to explain the following:

- What the common types of contagious illnesses are;
- How a person can be infected with the COVID-19 virus;
- Why it is so important to practice social distancing or “physical separation” to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection;
- What measures to take to reduce the risk of spreading any type of virus to others;
- Which steps caregivers should take to avoid infection when caring for a sick person;
- How to develop a pandemic plan for your family.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:

COMMON TYPES OF CONTAGIOUS ILLNESSES

- Every year, like clockwork, the cold and flu season arrives and people all over the globe fall ill after becoming infected with a virus-borne contagious illness.
- For example, the common cold and the seasonal flu are two examples we are all too familiar with. The seasonal flu is caused by an influenza virus and the common cold is caused by a coronavirus.
- Both of these types of viruses, influenza and corona, have the ability to evolve and change.
- In 2019, an outbreak of a novel or "new" coronavirus-borne respiratory disease spread worldwide. Known as "Corona Virus Disease 2019" or COVID-19 for short, this illness is highly contagious.
- There are vaccines available for both COVID-19 and Influenza. However, because of these viruses' ability to mutate into other variants, the available vaccines may need to be updated and/or booster shots given to be effective.
- The Centers for Disease Control, the CDC, advises that a person is fully vaccinated for COVID-19 or influenza two weeks after receiving the vaccine's final dose.
- The CDC advises that vaccinated people may still become carriers of COVID-19 and spread it to others, without becoming sick themselves.

HOW A PERSON CAN BE INFECTED WITH THE COVID-19 VIRUS

- To prevent the spread of COVID-19, the seasonal flu and similar contagious illnesses, all employees, healthcare workers and members of the general public must understand how these viruses are spread and what measures must be taken to prevent becoming infected.
- COVID-19 can spread from person to person in the same manner as other coronaviruses and influenzas.
- When an infected person sneezes or coughs, tiny droplets of fluid containing the virus are expelled into the air. When these droplets come in contact with the eyes, nose or mouth of a nearby person, that person can become infected with the virus.

- According to the CDC, this is the primary way COVID-19 is spread. The active virus, on average, can travel six feet or two meters when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- Evidence suggests that people infected with COVID-19 may also spread the disease when they speak or breathe via small fluid particles called aerosols. Once expelled, aerosols may linger in the air for a considerable period of time.
- In addition, the COVID-19 virus can survive on surfaces for several hours or longer. When a person touches an item or object that has been contaminated with a virus and then touches his or her face, eyes, nose, or mouth, that person may also become infected.
- The current best available information indicates that the COVID-19 virus can survive on cardboard for 24 hours, copper for four hours, plastic and metal surfaces for three days and on cloth and clothing for three days.

ASYMPTOMATIC CARRIERS & SOCIAL DISTANCING

- To prevent becoming infected with any type of contagious virus such as COVID-19 or the seasonal flu, you must avoid close contact with an infected person, and you must be vigilant in practicing good hygiene.
- People infected with the influenza virus are most contagious while exhibiting outward symptoms such as fever, chills and body aches.
- However, people infected with COVID-19 may be contagious while not exhibiting any outward symptoms. Infected people who do not have any symptoms are referred to as being "asymptomatic."
- The fast-paced spread of COVID-19 is partly due to asymptomatic carriers unwittingly spreading the virus to others. Therefore, the practice of social distancing, or "physical separation," is so important.
- Social distancing requires people to stay at least 6-feet or 2 meters apart. Employers, communities or health agencies may require social distancing when the community spread of a virus, such as COVID-19, is rampant.
- Practicing social distancing helps prevent both the spread and contraction of COVID-19 as well as other contagious viruses.
- The CDC also recommends wearing facemasks or face coverings to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- One type of facemask, known as an N-95 mask, protects against a minimum of 95% of airborne particles and is believed to be the most effective face covering to reduce the virus's transmission.
- However, N95 masks are often in shortened supply during the height of a pandemic. When this is the case, N95 masks should be reserved for healthcare workers and others at high risk.
- The CDC states that other face coverings can also effectively control the virus that causes COVID-19.
- When face coverings are deemed necessary due to local outbreak conditions, the CDC recommends a multi-layer, cloth face-covering without valves or vents be worn over a disposable "surgical type" face covering.
- A quick word of caution: it is NOT recommended to wear two disposable "surgical type" face coverings simultaneously, and it is NOT recommended to combine any additional face covering with an N95 type face mask. These mask combinations can cause breathing difficulty.
- The purpose of a face covering is to reduce the likelihood of one person spreading the virus to another.
- Primarily, a face covering will reduce the number of aerosols and particles that escape into the air by breathing, coughing, or sneezing, as well as the distance traveled by those particles.
- According to the CDC, the wearing of a face covering can also provide some protection against contracting COVID-19.
- Unless further research proves otherwise, fully vaccinated people may still be able to spread the virus that causes COVID-19 and the CDC recommends the continued use of face coverings and the ongoing practice of social distancing by vaccinated people in a public setting and when local outbreak conditions require it.
- Once vaccinated, stay alert for updated guidance from the CDC and other applicable governmental agencies as more research is conducted. Be aware that the guidance related to vaccinated people may change based on local outbreak conditions, the appearance of variant strains of the virus or updated scientific data.

PRECAUTIONS FOR PREVENTING INFECTION

- Practicing good hygiene is another preventative measure to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the seasonal flu and other contagious illnesses.
- Our hands can quickly become a source of infection because of the frequency with which we touch commonly used objects and then touch our face, eyes, nose or mouth.
- To prevent becoming infected in this manner, we must wash our hands frequently and we must also avoid touching our face with our hands.
- In order to kill viruses and germs, you must wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20-25 seconds.

- Be sure to wash hands frequently, between each finger, the back of the hand, and always after potential exposure.
- When soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol may also be used to clean your hands.
- Periodically sanitize commonly used items such as door handles, telephones, light switches, and similar objects, especially if there have been confirmed cases of contagious illness in your workplace or an outbreak in your local area.
- There are a variety of sanitizing agents available for this purpose. The Centers for Disease Control recommends a simple solution of one-quarter cup bleach per gallon of water.

SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19

- COVID-19 and the seasonal flu share common symptoms, including fever, cough, and shortness of breath. However, COVID-19 is unique in that sometimes it is accompanied by a loss of smell or taste.
- For COVID-19, these symptoms typically begin between 2 to 14 days after exposure. As for the flu, symptoms often begin 1 to 4 days after exposure.
- People affected by the coronavirus or the flu can be contagious before showing any symptoms.
- The impact of being infected by the flu or COVID-19 varies from person-to-person and can be mild, severe, or even fatal. The mortality rate of COVID-19 is significantly higher than that of the seasonal flu.
- During a large outbreak of a contagious illness such as COVID-19, local medical facilities may be overwhelmed with critically ill patients. It is important NOT to go to an emergency room or hospital for mild symptoms.
- Many people who experience mild symptoms fully recover with no medical assistance; however, if the illness progresses to a point where oxygen levels become too low, medical intervention is necessary.
- One way to monitor oxygen levels is with a pulse oximeter. A pulse oximeter measures oxygen saturation or the percentage of oxygen in the bloodstream. For healthy children and adults, normal oxygen saturation levels are between 95 to 100 percent. Oxygen levels less than 95% are concerning and require medical attention.
- Other indications of low oxygen levels include pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, trouble breathing, confusion, and the inability to arouse. Seek medical attention upon the occurrence of these symptoms.
- Older adults and people with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, or respiratory issues are more at risk of developing life-threatening complications from COVID-19 or the flu.

PRECAUTIONS FOR PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF VIRUSES TO OTHERS

- After the peak of a viral outbreak has passed and local communities have lifted face-covering requirements, it will still be important to follow basic hygiene practices to prevent the spread of contagious illness.
- To do this, always cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- One method is to use a tissue or paper towel for this purpose and then immediately throw it away and then thoroughly wash your hands.
- Another method is to cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder to contain any expelled droplets and then thoroughly wash your hands.
- People who are symptomatic or have been in close contact with a person known to be sick have a responsibility to help prevent spreading the illness.
- Voluntary isolation, or quarantine, is a responsible way to minimize the spread of contagious infections. Follow the recommendations of your local public health department and/or the CDC for the duration of the quarantine period.
- If you are sick, do not report to work. If your children are sick, do not send them to school or to childcare. Isolate yourself at home and contact your physician or other healthcare providers.
- Report your symptoms to the doctor and let them know if you have traveled to any areas of known COVID-19 outbreaks or if you have knowingly been exposed to the COVID-19 virus.
- If you plan to visit the doctor's office, you will be asked to wear a mask and you may be isolated from other patients.

REDUCING THE RISK OF INFECTION WHILE CARING FOR A SICK PERSON

- When caring for a sick person in your home that may have COVID-19 or other contagious illness, it is critical to take steps to reduce the risk of transmission from the patient to the caregiver.
- Only one person, in good health, should be assigned to care for the patient. No visitors should be allowed.
- The caregiver should avoid touching their face with their hands while caring for the patient. In addition, the caregiver should clean and disinfect all surfaces that are frequently touched.

- Anytime the home caregiver and patient are in close proximity, each should wear a surgical-type mask or other face-covering to reduce the risk of transmission.
- A caregiver should also wear disposable gloves anytime they contact the sick patients' blood, stool or bodily fluids.
- When caring for a sick patient, discard disposable masks and gloves after each use.
- To prevent contaminating your hands, disposable gloves must be removed by carefully holding the glove by the cuff without touching your skin and pulling the glove off while allowing it to turn inside out. While continuing to hold the removed glove in your fingers, slide a finger under the cuff of the remaining glove without touching the outside surface of the glove. Then use your finger to roll the glove inside out and dispose of both gloves in a segregated biohazard waste container.
- Always wash your hands immediately after removing disposable gloves.

PANDEMIC RESPONSE MEASURES

- Due to its fast-global spread, COVID-19 rapidly became a global pandemic. Future outbreaks of variants or other novel viruses may also escalate to a pandemic. A pandemic occurs when a highly contagious infectious disease emerges quickly throughout a large human population and causes serious illness on a global scale.
- Different countries and regions of the world will react differently to the occurrence of a pandemic.
- Even during a global pandemic, certain areas or regions will experience higher numbers of infections than others. For this reason, the measures put into place by local and national authorities may differ from region to region.
- Restricting travel to and from certain regions and requiring quarantine for new arrivals or those showing symptoms will be one of the first measures taken to control an outbreak or pandemic.
- More restrictive regional measures may also be taken in areas of an outbreak, such as cancelled public events, restricting large gatherings or closing public transportation.
- During a severe outbreak, certain types of businesses may be forced to close, school may be canceled and people who perform jobs deemed non-essential may be required to stay isolated in their homes.
- If you live in an area where these types of severe restrictions or a “lockdown” have occurred, it is important to follow local authorities’ instructions to reduce the spread of the infection.
- During a pandemic, the goal is to reduce the infection rate, so healthcare systems are not overwhelmed.
- In areas where restrictions are not mandatory, talk to your manager or supervisor to determine if it is possible to work from home or remotely during an outbreak.

DEVELOPING A PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS PLAN

- It is a good idea to stock your home during a pandemic with at least a two-week supply of water and food. You should also have a continuous supply of all household members' regular prescription drugs on hand for a two-week duration.
- Ensure you have an ample supply of any nonprescription drugs and any other health or hygiene necessities you may need.
- Get copies of and maintain electronic versions of your health records.
- Plan to care for other family members should they get sick. For general preparedness, agree on the point of contact where all family members can check-in and report their wellbeing.
- Stay informed about the pandemic through websites such as the Center for Disease Control in the United States, the Public Health Agency of Canada as well as the websites of local agencies and radio and television broadcasts.
- During a viral pandemic, the healthcare community will strive to create a vaccine as soon as possible. When a significant percentage of the population is vaccinated, the virus's spread will be reduced, and the virus will not have the opportunity to continue mutating into other variants. This is why it is important for as many people as possible to be vaccinated.
- During the initial stages of vaccine availability, the vaccine may be rationed and prioritized for those most vulnerable or who have occupational exposure. Consult the applicable government agencies to determine when you will be eligible for a vaccine.
- Under certain conditions, employers may require employees to be vaccinated during an outbreak of a contagious illness before returning to the workplace.
- In addition, verification of vaccination may be required for certain types of travel or other activities. It’s important to maintain possession of vaccination records.

SUMMARY

- During the cold and flu season, or any outbreak of contagious illness, your health and wellness and the health and wellness of your co-workers, friends and loved ones depend on the ability to prevent and control the spread of contagious illness.
- As we have learned in this program, practicing proper sanitation and hygiene procedures, staying home when you are ill or have symptoms, being vaccinated, wearing face coverings, and practicing social distancing when required will help control the spread of contagious illness in your home, workplace and community.
- Use the information you have learned in this program to do your part in preventing the spread of contagious illness.

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ANSWERS TO THE REVIEW QUIZ

1. b

2. a

3. c

4. b

5. a

6. a

7. b

8. a

9. a

10. c

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REVIEW QUIZ

The following questions are provided to determine how well you understand the information presented in this program.

Name _____ Date _____

1. The common cold is caused by a(n) _____.
 - a. Influenza virus
 - b. Coronavirus
 - c. Norovirus
 - d. Rotavirus
2. COVID-19 can spread from person to person in the same manner as other coronaviruses and influenzas.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. When soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least _____ alcohol may also be used to clean your hands.
 - a. 30 percent
 - b. 50 percent
 - c. 60 percent
4. For sanitizing purposes, the Centers for Disease Control recommends a solution of one cup of ammonia per gallon of water.
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. Social distancing requires people to stay at least 6-feet or 2 meters apart.
 - a. True
 - b. False
6. The purpose of a face covering is to reduce the likelihood of one person spreading the virus to another.
 - a. True
 - b. False
7. When caring for a COVID-19 patient, _____ should be assigned to care for the patient.
 - a. 3 people
 - b. 1 person
 - c. 2 people
8. Always wash your hands immediately after removing disposable gloves.
 - a. True
 - b. False
9. During a global pandemic, the response measures put into place by local and national authorities may differ from region to region.
 - a. True
 - b. False
10. As part of your pandemic preparedness plan, you should have enough water, food and prescription drugs on hand to last _____.
 - a. 2 days
 - b. 1 week
 - c. 2 weeks