

AREA RESIDENTS:

As news sources continue to announce new cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Minnesota, we know many of you have questions.

While this is a “novel” or a new version of the coronavirus, we’ve been battling other varieties of coronavirus for many years. Your local healthcare hospitals and caregivers are trained to manage infectious diseases, including new infectious diseases like coronavirus (COVID-19).

For most healthy people, however, mild cases will have symptoms like the common cold. People begin noting symptoms five days after exposure and are sick for a week; then, symptoms start improving. **We all know how to take care of mild cases—stay home, drink lots of fluids and curl up in bed for a few days.** Things will generally get better with time and rest. If symptoms are worsening, contact your healthcare team in the way they want you to connect with them on this matter; otherwise, stay home until symptoms are fully cleared.

Like any new infection, the first round in society is the hardest, and then things start getting better. Testing is more readily available each day; our public health system is hard at work; and, your doctors, advanced practice providers and nurses are here to support you. With some extra care, most of us can avoid getting sick.

HOW TO STAY HEALTHY & LIMIT SPREAD OF COVID-19

- 1) **Wash your hands.** Use soap and water for 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizers that are at least 60% alcohol. Wipe down surfaces that might hold droplets containing the virus.
- 2) **Practice social distancing.** This means keeping a six-foot bubble between you and your neighbor to prevent spread, coughing and sneezing into your elbow and avoiding touching public surfaces with your hands. Social distancing means finding creative ways to avoid physical contact with others. Shop at odd hours. Leave space between you and your neighbor at church or on the bus. Avoid shaking hands and hugging. Use waves, jazz hands and big friendly smiles instead of physical touch. Avoid large gatherings in confined spaces.
- 3) **Take caution if you become sick.** Whether you have a cold, the flu or suspect coronavirus, it is important to take care of yourself. Your first step should be to call your clinic to ask about next steps. Most healthy folks can treat this at home, with acetaminophen and ibuprofen for fever, lots of rest and lots of fluids. If you’re not seriously ill, then stay home, stay warm and avoid infecting others. Healthcare is just a phone call away—you’ll be more comfortable at home in your pajamas than waiting all day in the emergency room.
- 4) **Support those who are vulnerable.** Who does this include? Anyone over age 60, those who have lung problems (these are folks who use an inhaler or have smoked for many years), those who have blood pressure issues and those who have a compromised immune system (like those on chemo or with transplants). These folks may need extra help with coronavirus, just as they do with the flu or a cold. The more severely ill need to be the focus of hospitals, physicians and other healthcare resources. We all have many important folks in our lives who are vulnerable, let us work together so they have healthcare resources when needed.

Those who are ill, please contact your hospital for direction before entering the facility. If you are at risk for severe symptoms, consider avoiding crowded places or events that put you in close contact with others. For example, worship at home instead of at church, dine in instead of out and refill your prescriptions for several weeks in advance to reduce unnecessary public outings when this infection is circulating.

Together as local healthcare systems we have long established standard emergency preparedness protocols in place in collaboration with other local emergency services and agencies. Our colleagues in Infection Prevention are collaborating with our State health department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and neighboring health systems.

We will continue to monitor this virus and refine our coordinated response accordingly. Together we will do our part to ensure a safe and health community.

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