

SAFETY NET

FOR CAREGIVERS AND THOSE WHO SUPPORT THEM

Special Edition, Issue 7

The MENTOR Network

March 2020

The MENTOR Network recognizes that awareness and education are critical components to our ability to manage known and emerging health issues. There are risks to overreacting but also meaningful risks to not being prepared. A dedicated, multidisciplinary team from across The MENTOR Network meets regularly to provide information and guidance so that we may all become well prepared to respond to symptoms associated with diseases and to prevent the spread of viruses that cause them. *Thank you for all that you do to promote the health and safety of the people we support!*

Health Advisory

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Influenza (the flu) have received attention recently in the news. At the time of this issue of *Safety Net*, the flu season is active and slated to continue through April, while COVID-19 is a new illness that was first identified in humans in late 2019.

Tens of thousands of Americans die from the flu each year. COVID-19 has affected thousands of people in different countries. Because the disease is new, people do not have immunity against it yet. Health experts are concerned that it could become as established as the flu. The spread of flu is minimized through seasonal vaccinations and ongoing precautions. While experts work on developing a vaccine against COVID-19, it is important that we work together to do what we CAN to minimize spread and protect ourselves and the people we serve.

Our focus remains on the health and safety of the individuals we support, their families and guardians – and all of you – the people who support them.

How COVID-19 Spreads

Current understanding about how the virus that causes COVID-19 spreads is largely based on what is known about similar coronaviruses. COVID-19 is a new disease and there is more to learn about how it spreads, the severity of illness it causes, and to what extent it may spread in the United States. The disease is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the

mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching his or her own mouth, nose or eyes.

Known: COVID-19 spreads through respiratory droplets from coughs and sneezes that are then either inhaled into the lungs or are transferred through touch from a surface of an object to a person's mouth, nose or possibly eyes.

Symptoms

People can experience mild to severe forms of COVID-19. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure. Illness can be more severe for some people and can lead to pneumonia and breathing difficulties.

People may experience:

- Cough
- Fever
- Shortness of breath (severe cases)

Who is most at risk for serious health complications?

Persons young and old can catch the coronavirus, but most people recover from the disease without needing special treatment. However, seniors and people with other medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, lung or heart disease, are the most vulnerable to becoming severely ill. Women who are pregnant are also considered to be more at risk for complications.

For everyone's safety, it is important to exercise precaution by using universal precautions, keeping one's distance from those who are ill and from those who have

recently travelled to places where there is an ongoing spread of COVID-19, covering mouths and noses when sneezing or coughing, and washing hands often.

What YOU Can Do

If you have concerns or questions regarding someone who may have been exposed to COVID-19, please contact your supervisor (if you are an employee) or program contact (if you are a Mentor).

- **If someone we serve** experiences symptoms associated with COVID-19 or the flu – a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or difficulty breathing – call the person’s doctor AND immediately inform your program contact (if you are a Mentor) or supervisor (if you are an employee). The CDC considers a person to have a fever who has a measured temperature of at least 100.4 °F (37.8 °C). Fever may also be considered present if a person feels warm to the touch or gives a history of feeling feverish.
- **If YOU have symptoms** of acute respiratory illness, it is recommended that you notify your program contact (Mentor) or manager (employee) and self-quarantine until you are free of fever, of signs of a fever, and of any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants).
- **If YOU have traveled** to any country or state (within the past 4 weeks) that has a CDC travel warning, please notify your program contact (Mentor) or supervisor (employee). The CDC warning can be found here: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html.

Should you bring the person to the ER?

The important first step is to contact the person’s doctor for recommendations and to isolate the person (i.e., minimize the person’s contact with others) so as to reduce exposure. The CDC recommends NOT taking the person to the hospital or urgent care clinic unless the hospital or doctor recommends doing so. This precaution is to prevent exposing others to the virus, since a vaccine has not been developed yet.

What else can you do to prevent the flu and other diseases?

It is important as ever to practice good health habits and to encourage those habits in those you support. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. And get a flu vaccination. These are things we can do to strengthen our immune system.

Tip: Where it makes sense to do so, provide supports to people while standing beside them (instead of in front of them) to minimize contact with respiratory droplets from uncovered coughs and sneezes.

Remember Universal Precautions!

Frequent handwashing is a reliable defense against spreading many types of diseases, including coronaviruses, the common cold and the flu.

Immediately and thoroughly wash hands and other surfaces that have come into contact with respiratory droplets or other contaminants. Wash hands and other skin surfaces with soap and running water, rubbing hands together for 20 seconds.

It is most effective to wash hands immediately:

- Before eating or handling food;
- After eating or assisting others with eating;
- After going to the bathroom or assisting in toileting or diapering;
- After coming into contact with body fluid, whether it is visible or not;
- After cleaning area or surfaces that were contaminated with body fluids;
- After handling pets or pet equipment;
- After handling garbage; and
- After removing gloves, even if gloves appear to be intact.

Remember to use universal precautions with surfaces and other items. There should be no sharing of personal items, such as toothbrushes, razors or anything that is put in the mouth, etc. Eating utensils should be washed with hot, soapy water and dried before others use them. Other household items, such as towels, burpees, etc. should be laundered before others use them as well.

How to Talk about COVID-19 with the People You Support

Everyone is understandably concerned about the coronavirus. The children and adults you support will have questions. You may have questions as well. When talking with them about COVID-19, it is important to make sure you have up-to-date information from trustworthy sources, such as the CDC.gov, and to talk in a manner that keeps the other person calm.

Knowing the person you support goes a long way to helping them process current events and to understand how it affects them and what they can control.

General tips for talking about the coronavirus with others include:

- Be aware of your own fears and reactions. Remember, most communication occurs through body language and tone of voice. Be conscious about how you present yourself when talking about serious issues.
- Remind the person that you are there to help keep them safe and healthy.
- Ask the person what they already know. While listening, assess what information is OK to share with them. It is important to offer information that is appropriate to their age or ability to understand.
- Listen to their concerns and offer empathy, and help them see what is realistic. Currently the risk of becoming ill is low and most people who are infected only have mild symptoms.

Other Facts

- People of Asian descent are not more likely to have COVID-19.
- People who have been in close contact with someone who is known to have COVID-19 or lives in or has recently been in an area with ongoing spread is at an increased risk of exposure.
- People who have completed quarantine or have been released from isolation do not pose a risk of infection to other people.

Reject Fear and Prejudice

Let your compassion for others diffuse conflict and help those around you to respond calmly when fear is present. We can take steps to protect ourselves and the people we support without shaming or harming others.

Resources

Influenza Resource

The CDC has a dedicated website for news and information regarding the flu: www.flu.gov

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Resource

This is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation. For general information about COVID-19 from the CDC: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

CDC Travel Warning Information:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html

How to Talk to Children about the Coronavirus

<https://www.brighthorizons.com/family-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid19>

