

Thoughts on the Importance of Social Distancing to Protect Our Community

I noted reports of college students who were planning to continue with their Spring Break plans over the next several weeks.

The appropriate question to ask these students (or others with a similar mindset) is not whether they are willing to accept the risk of contracting COVID-19 but, are they willing to accept the risk of infecting their friends, their families, their community.

Our focus needn't be how do I prevent myself from becoming infected but rather, **how do I prevent myself from infecting others.**

Some things to keep in mind:

1. Viruses survive by transmitting **before** the onset of symptoms. Cough, fever, congestion, arthralgias (joint pains), vomiting, diarrhea, sneezing – all occur as a result of your immune system fighting off an infection. There is a lag period before your immune system recognizes an infection and then builds a response to that infection. You **ARE** contagious during the period before the onset of symptoms to COVID-19, and to any viral infection. This is how viruses survive – they need to spread to survive – they need the next host. Current Global data on COVID-19 indicates that 80% of positive individuals deny any known exposure prior to contracting the illness.
2. Viruses survive by mutating (changing their defense mechanism) The Spanish Flu (is not in the Coronavirus Family but, also an RNA Virus, Orthomyxoviridae Family, H1N1 or, commonly known as, Influenza A) is an example of a virus mutating after initial spread. The second wave of the Spanish flu in 1918 was far deadlier than the first partially due to mutation. This is also of primary concern with COVID-19. Patterns of severe infections in younger people with COVID-19 is a more recent development. Again, mutation is a viral defense mechanism...that is why there is no cure for the common cold (a Coronavirus).
3. Not all viruses follow a seasonal pattern. The deadliest wave of the Spanish flu was in the Summer and Fall.

So; what should we do?

1. Act as though you HAVE COVID-19...it is a bit of reverse psychology...but, act as though you are at risk for spreading the infection to others – smartest and safest approach.
2. Social distancing. 3 – 6 feet from others. Again, the most common distance Americans normally stand when comfortably speaking with someone is 3 ft. Ever traveled to Europe? The distance there is less than 3 feet – and most Americans immediately feel uncomfortable with the intrusion of “personal space”. So, take your normal conversational spacing with others and add another step back.

3. Take a handkerchief or tissues with you when you go out, cough or sneeze into that.
4. Wash your hands after returning from being out.
5. COVID-19 will not infect you through your intact skin. It is washed off and neutralized by simple soap and water – no fancy detergents or other needed. Your standard everyday surface cleansers will eradicate COVID-19 as well.
6. COVID-19 will not survive outside of a host environment from more than 1-2 hours.
7. Avoid touching your face (this is the most common way people inoculate themselves).
8. Work from home – most businesses are gravitating in this direction – weed down your business to only essential personnel – let the others work from home.
9. Sick individuals, stay home – 14 days minimum. Must be asymptomatic (off any cold and flu medications) to return to work
10. The less people in your family that are going to high risk areas (grocery shopping, other public gathering places) the better – remember, you are trying to decrease your level of exposure – follow suit as a couple / family.

A few points to keep in mind:

1. This is a new strain of virus for the human population – we don't know what we don't know...err on the side of caution. Be smart.
2. The amount of time you are at home is directly proportional to your risk reduction for contracting the virus.
3. The more you are unnecessarily in public places, the more you increase your risk of contracting the virus. Do you HAVE to be there? If the answer is no, don't be.
4. You CANNOT catch the virus IF you are NOT exposed.
5. The better we are at social distancing the FASTER this infection burns out.
6. There are **no** cases of people getting COVID-19 more than once...so, think about it – IF **no** new cases developed today – this whole mess would be gone in 2 weeks or less...be part of the solution...not part of the problem.