

## COVID-19 FAQ COMMUNITY WATCH

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We know there are a lot of questions about COVID-19, and its impact is evolving everyday. These guidelines are for community members who want to help protect their community's health. Use them to combat common myths and misconceptions regarding covid-19 and check [www.abccardio.org](http://www.abccardio.org) for regular updates. You should also watch the [ABC Webinar, At The Heart of The Matter: Unmasking the Invisibility of COVID-19 in Diverse Populations](#), to learn more about the virus.

### | What are the stages of COVID-19 (coronavirus) infection?

In the early stages of COVID-19 infection (days 1–7), the virus enters the cells of the body and grows. Common symptoms are fever, dry cough, body aches and pains, headache, and tiredness. Also, some people may have nausea, diarrhea, or unusual symptoms, such as loss of smell or taste, or eye pain. Many people may not have symptoms at all and do not feel ill, but the virus can continue to grow at this early stage. This is the reason that people without symptoms can continue to spread the virus from person to person.

Some people may develop more severe lung infections. Signs and symptoms include shortness of breath, low oxygen levels, and lung abnormalities on chest X-ray or CT scan. People with shortness of breath may need to be seen in the emergency room and hospitalized for oxygen and supportive care.

A small number of people will a more severe infection. This can occur at any time, but tends to occur during days 10–14 of infection. During this late stage of COVID-19, the body works hard to fight off the virus (a response called cytokine storm). The disease can cause severe medical complications including heart failure, respiratory failure, sepsis, and blood clots. These people require medical care in an intensive care unit (ICU).

Overall, about 80% of people do not need hospital care. Around 1 out of every 6 people who get COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing, requiring ICU care and ventilator support. Unfortunately, most people who need ventilator support have done poorly and succumb to the virus.

## **What are the heart and blood vessel complications associated with COVID-19?**

The most common cardiovascular complications include rapidly progressive heart muscle injury, inflammation of the heart muscle, dangerously low blood pressure, and life-threatening abnormal heart beats. Heart failure may also occur. With heart failure, the ability to circulate blood is decreased, and fluid may accumulate in the lungs. The cause of these problems is unclear but might include the viral infection, inflammation, stress, or blood clotting.

## **What medical treatments are currently recommended for management of COVID-19?**

Currently, there are no therapies specifically approved for COVID-19 infection prevention or treatment. Any medicines given for treating COVID-19 should be prescribed by a healthcare provider. There is no vaccine yet available for COVID-19, and one is not expected for at least 12 months. Most individuals will recover with over-the-counter medications for treatment of symptoms, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) for fever.

Hydroxychloroquine, with or without azithromycin, has not been proven to be effective against COVID-19. Hydroxychloroquine can potentially cause lethal heart problems. Remdesivir is another medication that may stop viral reproduction and is under evaluation for potential use in hospitalized patients. Additionally, blood plasma from patients who were previously infected with COVID-19 and recovered is being tested as a potential treatment. Currently, all of these therapies are being evaluated in FDA-sanctioned clinical research. If you have a COVID-19 infection, strongly consider participating in an FDA-sanctioned clinical study; it may be your only opportunity to obtain effective therapy.

## **Is it safe to continue taking angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors (ACEI) or angiotensin receptor blockers (ARB)?**

The Association of Black Cardiologists, in conjunction with the American Heart Association, American College of Cardiology, and Heart Failure Society of America strongly recommend that patients currently taking ACEI or ARB continue taking these medications as prescribed. The ACEI and ARB medications very effectively control blood pressure and protect the heart. Abrupt discontinuation of these drugs can lead to loss of blood pressure control and heart failure. At this point in time, the role, if any, of these medications with regard to COVID-19 is unknown. It is important to continue taking your medication as prescribed by your healthcare provider and stay in control.

## Are African Americans at increased risk of getting a coronavirus infection, and are they at increased risk of more severe disease from COVID-19?

We are currently not aware of any genetic predisposition that puts African Americans at increased risk of contracting COVID-19. However, many people of color live in metropolitan, densely populated areas, often in multi-generational households, and have jobs that do not allow them to work from home, and rely on public transportation; all of these factors can increase the rate of virus transmission and risk of contracting COVID-19. However, the risk of being exposed to COVID-19 can be high, even in smaller towns where people of color live, work, and worship in close proximity, often in multi-generational households. Also, health resources and insurance are less available in communities of color.

Cardiovascular diseases, including hypertension, diabetes, heart failure, asthma, and obesity are risk factors for severe disease or death from COVID-19. If you have any of these underlying conditions, it is crucial to get them under control and practice the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) safety guidelines to avoid becoming infected with COVID-19. If you have any of the risk factors for severe disease and you develop any fever or flu-like symptoms, you should seek care and get tested. Most of all, stay on your current medication regimen.

## How can communities of color control the spread of COVID-19 and prevent infection?

To reduce the rate of transmission, it is important to avoid potentially spreading COVID-19 to others by staying home if you feel unwell. Additionally, if you feel unwell, it is also important to contact a healthcare provider to determine next steps. Symptoms of shortness of breath should result in urgently seeking medical care. It is also important to:

- ▶ Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use a hand sanitizer with more than 70% alcohol content if soap is unavailable.
- ▶ The ABC, in conjunction with the CDC, also recommend practicing physical or social distancing (remaining at least 6 feet away from others).
- ▶ The ABC recommends wearing a mask — homemade or bandanna — in public.
- ▶ When in public places or using public transportation, it is extremely important to practice physical distancing and use face masks and hand-sanitizers or disposable gloves. Remember to avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Discard all gloves following use.

- ▶ Stay in frequent contact with friends and family via telephone or video chat to combat feelings of isolation. Maintaining physical and mental health is very important during these challenging times.
- ▶ It is essential to **continue all medications** provided by your healthcare team since serious conditions, such as heart attack and stroke, may still occur. If you develop symptoms of a heart attack or stroke, it is still important to seek care immediately. **Do not let fear of Covid-19 prevent you from getting necessary emergency care.**
- ▶ Eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables as much as possible; there is some evidence that vitamins, such as vitamin C, may be beneficial to boost your immune system.

## **How will COVID-19 impact my health?**

The fear of coronavirus in our communities and hospitals has taken control of our nation. There is tremendous reluctance for anyone to be anywhere near a health care facility unless absolutely necessary. The number of emergency room visits for non COVID-19 related illness has dropped dramatically during the pandemic.

COVID-19 hits those with poorly controlled diabetes and heart disease the hardest. All people with high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart failure should take action to get under control, NOW!

- ▶ Take all medications as directed; diet and exercise.
- ▶ Monitor blood pressure, blood sugar, or daily weight more frequently.
- ▶ Contact your healthcare provider with any questions; use telemedicine if available.
- ▶ Boost your diet with more fruits and vegetables while being aware of high sodium foods packaged to extend shelf life.
- ▶ Use this opportunity to become more physically active, such as walking, while physically distancing.
- ▶ Limit the use of alcohol, and do not smoke.
- ▶ Practice physical distancing while remaining socially engaged; connect with a health advocate or another family member.
- ▶ Enhance your spirituality!

## | What if I get sick during the pandemic?

The symptoms of COVID-19 are fever and shortness of breath. If you develop COVID-19 symptoms, you should contact your healthcare team for further instruction. Most coronavirus infections can be successfully managed at home; however, if you already have impaired health, your ability to tolerate the infection may be compromised, and you should seek hospital care sooner. This is especially true if you feel faint or have to breathe more than 20 times a minute.

If you develop severe symptoms that are not COVID-19-related, such as chest pain, fluid retention, stroke, or heart attack, you should seek help. Suffering it out at home could lead to deadly consequences or severe complications caused by delayed treatment.

## | Be aware that hospital policies have changed significantly since your last visit!

- ▶ Call the hospital before you go to determine its capacity, especially if your problems are not viral in nature; you may be directed to a more appropriate hospital.
- ▶ Once you get to the hospital, be sure to follow the distancing policy, even if those around you do not.
- ▶ There is currently no cure known for COVID-19; many promising medications are currently under investigation, and hopefully, a vaccine will be available soon.
- ▶ If you are asked, strongly consider agreeing to participate in FDA-sanctioned clinical research; it may be your only chance to get effective therapy.

COVID-19 has exposed cracks in the health care system that lead to excess death, sickness, and suffering. We must act together to control the impact that this virus will have on our lives. We will come out of this stronger, but we must be vigilant and protect ourselves, now.

## **I am frightened of the thought of catching COVID-19 and it's creating a lot of stress and anxiety in my life. How do I cope with this situation?**

An outbreak of a serious contagious disease like COVID-19 can cause stress and anxiety, which can be quite overwhelming for people. Stress can have a negative impact on the body and may be seen in the form of:

- ▶ Difficulty sleeping and concentrating;
- ▶ Worsening physical and mental health;
- ▶ Changes in eating patterns; and/or
- ▶ Fear for your health and your family's well-being.

Those who may be most affected by stress from the COVID-19 crisis are older people, those with serious health conditions or chronic diseases, children and teenagers, caregivers, families affected with COVID-19, healthcare providers, first responders, and people with mental illness including problems with substance abuse.

Take care of yourself and your family to cope with the stress of this crisis. Take breaks from watching the news on COVID-19, and take care of your health with healthy eating, daily exercise, yoga, meditation, deep breathing, stretching, and proper sleep. Also, enjoy fun activities such as dancing or a hobby, but avoid alcohol and drugs.

Most importantly, be spiritually active, and make faith an important part of your life. Stay connected with those you care about and who care about you. Remember to reach out to those who are most affected by COVID-19.

## **What should you do if you have close contact with someone with COVID-19?**

Limit your contact with other family members, friends, and coworkers. Immediately, call your healthcare provider, and tell them about your contact with the infected person and about any symptoms.

Your healthcare provider will advise you regarding your next steps, such as testing, monitoring your symptoms, visiting a healthcare provider, and quarantining yourself to protect your other family members.