CORONAVIRUS AND COVID-19

The coronavirus is one in a family of coronaviruses, named for the crown-like appearance of spikes on their surface. COVID-19 is the disease that can result from exposure, named for “coronavirus disease,” which was first identified in 2019.

SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT OF COVID-19

Many may remain “asymptomatic,” or show no symptoms, and may not realize they are infected. Others will show mild symptoms of fever, cough, body aches, fatigue or gastrointestinal issues, which can take two to three weeks to emerge after infection. Shortness of breath is a more serious sign of illness, which may eventually require hospitalization, including use of a ventilator. Warning signs include pain or pressure in the chest, confusion or unresponsiveness and bluish lips or face. A sudden loss of smell or taste may precede other symptoms. Anyone exhibiting these symptoms should seek immediate medical attention.

There is no specific medicine to treat COVID-19 at this time, and many are able to recover at home. The CDC suggests getting plenty of rest, staying hydrated, avoiding contact with others (including those in your household) and sanitizing high-contact surfaces in the home.

Doctors and researchers are continually learning more about the virus and multiple drugs are being studied as possible treatments, though it is too early to evaluate their effectiveness.

The standard of care focuses on supportive care to relieve symptoms, and this does not currently differ for patients with cancer versus those without.

MINIMIZING YOUR RISK

Those who are immunocompromised due to cancer treatment, or those who have existing respiratory conditions, should be extra cautious about reducing exposure by staying at home, avoiding crowds and sanitizing outside items and packages.

The coronavirus is passed primarily through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Avoid people who are sick, even family members. When outside or around others, avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or if soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 70% alcohol.

As the coronavirus can persist for hours, use a cloth or your sleeve when touching high-contact surfaces like elevator buttons, railings, faucets and door handles.

Face masks are most effective when used by infected individuals, but the CDC encourages use of cloth face coverings (fabric masks, scarves, bandanas) in public for all individuals. Surgical masks should be reserved for health care professionals and first responders.

Wipe down and sanitize packages and items coming from outside the home; bleach and other household cleaners appear to be effective.
SOCIAL DISTANCING
Social distancing is the practice of avoiding large gatherings and maintaining a distance of at least six feet from others while in public. Many local, state and federal government offices have also mandated limited activity outside of the home, restrictions on the size of groups, closure of businesses and other regulations for the sake of public health. These policies will vary by municipality and state.

WHAT IF I HAVE BEEN EXPOSED OR EXHIBIT SYMPTOMS?
If you are concerned that you have been infected by the coronavirus or are exhibiting any symptoms, contact your health care team immediately. If an in-person visit is not possible, you may be able to reach your doctor for a consultation over the phone or via video-conference. Your doctor can advise on next steps, such as testing and quarantine measures, as needed.

HOW LONG WILL THE CORONAVIRUS AND COVID-19 BE A THREAT?
At this stage, it is unclear how long social distancing and other practices will be part of daily life. Researchers around the world are working to develop a vaccine for COVID-19, though this process could take 12 months or longer due to clinical trials and other viability tests.

Coping with a situation like the coronavirus pandemic is not easy for anyone, especially those who are affected by cancer. CancerCare’s master’s-prepared oncology social workers can provide emotional support and help you access additional resources in your area. To speak with an oncology social worker, call our toll-free Hopeline at 800-813-HOPE (4673) or visit www.cancercare.org to learn more. Additional resources are available at cancercare.org/coronavirus.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Information on the coronavirus and COVID-19 is changing rapidly. For the latest, look to these trusted and reputable sources:

Coronavirus.gov
www.coronavirus.gov

American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
www.entnet.org/content/coronavirus-disease-2019-resources

American Society for Clinical Oncology
www.asco.org/asco-coronavirus-information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov

National Cancer Institute
www.cancer.gov/contact/emergency-preparedness/coronavirus

World Health Organization
www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

CancerCare® Can Help
Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master’s-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call 800-813-HOPE (4673).

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