



Ethically Speaking...

Newsletter of the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute
at Assumption University

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Ethically Speaking...

provides news and information from the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute at Assumption University.



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The Novel Coronavirus
COVID-19
The Facts You Need to Know.

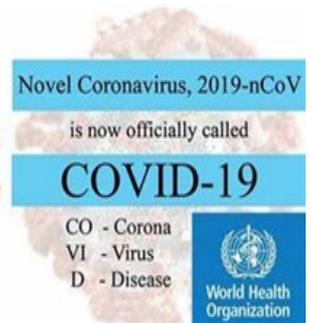
In December of 2019, an outbreak of pneumonia occurred in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The virus, identified as the cause of the outbreak, was labelled Coronavirus Disease 2019 or COVID-19 for short.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that affect both animals and humans. There are those which cause illness in people (e.g., common cold, SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome), and others that circulate among mammals (e.g., bats, camels) and birds. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can spread to humans and subsequently spread between people, as was the case with SARS and MERS and now COVID-19.

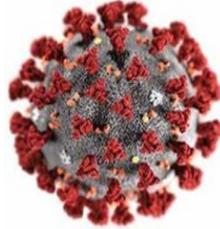
The coronaviruses that routinely affect humans can usually be handled by our immune system. They often cause symptoms like those of the common cold. But those viruses that spread from animals to humans such as SARS MERS and now COVID-19, are much harder to fight and treat. COVID-19 is a potentially severe acute respiratory infection with symptoms ranging from a mild common cold-like illness, to a severe viral pneumonia leading to acute respiratory distress syndrome that is potentially fatal.

How does it work?

One of the simplest and clearest explanations about the working of the virus, comes from Dr. Peter Lin, a family physician and educator in Toronto. In a video posted by the CBC, he explained that the coronavirus looks like a tennis



ball with spikes sticking out of it. Depending on the type of spike, the virus attaches to certain places in the body. With certain viruses, the spikes attach to our nose, resulting in a common cold. Other coronaviruses such as SARS and now COVID-19 have spikes that allows it to attach to the cells in your lungs. Once attached, it puts in information to make photocopies of itself, using our lungs to replicate and make more viruses.



What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to the virus. Initially, the virus will cause flu or cold-like symptoms such as a stuffy nose, but as the virus replicates it damages the lung cells. As a result, the body's ability to exchange oxygen is diminished and that's why one of the early symptoms is shortness of breath and difficulty breathing. Symptoms may be very mild or more serious, and can include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing

It is most commonly spread from an infected person through:

- respiratory droplets when you cough or sneeze
- close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- touching something with the virus on it, then touching your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands

Coronaviruses are not known to spread through ventilation systems or through water.

Since it is a new virus, our immune system has not produced antibodies to fight this virus off. Those who have compromised immune systems, such as the very young and the elderly, may have worse outcomes if they contract the virus. Because

pregnant women are also immunosuppressed, questions about transmitting the virus to the unborn baby have also surfaced. According to the CDC, whether a pregnant woman with COVID-19 can transmit the virus to her fetus or neonate by other routes of vertical transmission (before, during, or after delivery) is still unknown. However, in limited recent case series of infants born to mothers with COVID-19 none of the infants have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19. Additionally, the virus was not detected in samples of amniotic fluid or breastmilk.

Treatment

Most people with common human coronavirus illnesses will recover on their own. There is no vaccine available, however a great deal of research is currently underway, but it could take some time before a vaccine is developed and approved for use in Canada. Although there is no specific treatment at this time, our health care system is able to provide effective care for people who develop a serious COVID-19 illness.

Protecting Yourself

Coronaviruses are spread mainly from person to person through close contact, for example, in a household, workplace or health care centre. To reduce exposure to the virus and protect your health, the following everyday actions can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses:

- ⇒ wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- ⇒ sneeze and cough into your sleeve
- ⇒ avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- ⇒ avoid contact with people who are sick
- ⇒ stay home if you are sick

A Word About Masks

Despite popular belief, there is little benefit to wearing a mask to protect you from the virus if you are well. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not recommend wearing masks for healthy individuals. Masks should be worn if *you are showing symptoms of being infected with a respiratory virus or if you are caring for someone who may be infected.* Masks are most effective when used in combination with frequent hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.

The N95 masks (respirator masks) on the market require special fitting and testing in order to be effective. Experts strongly recommend against members of the public using N95 masks, as they can make it more difficult to breathe for some individuals, especially those with chronic breathing problems. They provide little, if any, benefit beyond that provided by a procedure mask, as well they deplete the supply to those who work in healthcare or caring for those who are infected.

Experts say the best way to prevent coronavirus is frequent and thorough handwashing. Soap and water are far more effective than hand sanitizer. If you're using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, you should make sure that it contains at least 60% alcohol. CBS News chief medical correspondent Dr. Jon LaPook points out that it's especially important to make sure that you scrub the soap into your fingertips because they are the part of the hand most often neglected and the part of the hand most likely to touch your face and spread disease. The CDC also advises covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing and avoiding touching your face, nose or mouth remain the best evidence-based ways to prevent the spread of respiratory illness.

Risk to Canadians

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has assessed the public health risk associated with COVID-19 as low for Canada. Public health risk is continually reassessed as new information becomes available.

The risk to Canadian travellers abroad is generally low but will vary depending on the destination. The Public Health Agency of Canada is closely monitoring the spread of COVID-19 in other countries. Please consult the destination page on travel.gc.ca for the latest travel advice.

It is important for all travellers to monitor their health when they return to Canada. While abroad, you may have come in contact with the novel coronavirus. PHAC asks that you monitor your health for fever, cough and difficulty breathing for 14 days after you arrive in Canada. If you have these symptoms, call the public health authority in the province or territory you are in to inform them. They will provide advice on what you should do.

In Ontario

Ontario is working with its partners in the health care system implementing a robust plan to monitor for, detect and, if needed, isolate any cases of COVID-19. The Ministry of Health is taking several steps to ensure the health and safety of Ontarians. This includes:

- monitoring hospitals for potential cases of the virus in individuals with travel history to current affected areas
- adding the virus as a designated disease reportable under Ontario's public health legislation, enabling local public health units to prevent and control further spread of the infection
- meeting with hospitals, paramedics and local public health units near Pearson International Airport to provide further information on the federal border screening measures

Windsor Essex County

Local health officials assure us that Windsor-Essex will be ready for COVID-19 and there is no need to panic. Dr. Wajid Ahmed, medical officer of health with the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, encourages local residents who have travelled to any of the countries affected by the virus in the last 14 days to contact the local 519-258-2146, ext. 1420.

At this point there are no cases in Windsor Essex County. Early diagnosis and isolation are the key to ensuring the virus is not spread. The virus can only survive in the body and is spread through sneezing and coughing. Anyone experiencing illness with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should self-quarantine.

Dr. Wassim Saad, chief of staff at Windsor Regional Hospital, stressed the need for personal responsibility. Those who have symptoms should not go to their family physicians, clinics or hospital emergency, but rather stay home. COVID-19 is a viral infection and as such, there is no specific treatment that is available. According to Dr. Saad, the symptoms are usually self-resolving.

If symptoms are severe and persistent, contact the health unit at 519-258-2146, ext. 1420. Anyone with questions can visit the local health unit's online webpage on the issue at wechu.org/coronavirus.

If you are seriously ill and require immediate medical attention be sure to notify EMS and/or the Hospital that you may have COVID-19 so that they can prepare. If you have travelled to any of the countries experiencing an outbreak inform them of your travel history.

Each of us can help be prepared by knowing the facts about how COVID-19 spreads and how to prevent illness. Below are other reliable resources for information and updates about the virus:

- ◆ Windsor Regional Hospital
<https://www.wrh.on.ca/coronavirus?>
- ◆ Ministry of Health's Page on Coronavirus offers updated information in multiple languages:
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus#section-12>
- ◆ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html#a3>

References:

COVID-19 fact sheet Public Health Agency of Canada
canada.ca/coronavirus phac.info.aspc@canada.ca <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/know-facts-about-coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

Chen, Huijun et al. Clinical characteristics and intrauterine vertical transmission potential of COVID-19 infection in nine pregnant women: a retrospective review of medical records
The Lancet, Volume 0, Issue 0

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus#section-11>

BMJ Best Practices COVID-19 Feb.17, 2020 <https://bestpractice.bmj.com/topics/en-us/3000168>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2020/02/29/despite-covid-19-coronavirus-here-is-why-you-should-stop-buying-face-masks/#4fcc21a22ab8>

FAQ COVID-19 <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-ncov-2019-public-faq.pdf>
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

Dalson Chen <https://windsorstar.com/news/local-news/>



Ethically Speaking ... provides news, articles and information from the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute at Assumption University in Windsor, Ontario. We welcome comments and feedback. Should you have suggestions for future articles or inserts, please contact us at : CCBI-A@assumptionu.ca

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