

Health and Safety Committee Newsletter (April 3, 2020)

5 Practical Steps to Stop COVID-19 Spread:

1. STAY HOME

This is the most important step at this time. As directed by the health authorities, and especially important for the elderly and higher risk with pre-existing illnesses, please stay home to prevent catching or spreading this virus. If you must go out (e.g. grocery shopping once or twice a week), wear a mask, keep a physical distance of 6 ft. and avoid crowds.

2. WASH HANDS (And Hand Sanitizer If Can't Wash Hands)

When out in public areas, just assume everything that you will touch is infected (e.g. door handles, hand rails, cross walk/elevator buttons, bus/subway poles, even money, etc.) And this part is very important: you must not touch your face at all if your hands are not clean. Not even if your nose or eyes are itchy. Once you get back home, washing your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water will destroy the outer layer of the virus. And don't forget to clean your smartphone if you use it a lot.

3. WEAR MASK

A bit of background info. Extensive testing from China, Italy, South Korea, Iceland and the Diamond Princess cruise ship show that a significant 20-25% of those who tested positive for SARS-COV2 virus showed no symptoms of COVID-19 illness and never developed any symptoms at all. What this means is both good and bad. Good that many can get infected and not be sick, but bad that many can get infected and not even know it themselves. Such silent transmission may account for 30-40% of cases of infection, and this virus is very contagious, with an infectious rate 3-4x more than usual flu. Also recent data shows the death rate to be around 1%, not as high as 3% as previously thought, but still 10x the death rate of usual flu and at least 4x the hospitalization rate of usual flu.

However what's important about this death rate is that it can be used to calculate the infection rate in the general population (20 days prior because it takes that long from infection to death) and that comes out to be 20-30x what's reported by the health authorities in the news at that time. Why the big difference? Because there are not enough tests to go around that we can test everyone yet, and also because there are a lot of people with the virus who don't even know that they have it.

So what does this mean for masks? Asia Pacific countries with densely packed populations that have experienced SARS, MERS, Ebola, and frequent swine/avian flu outbreaks know that masks are very important in preventing virus transmission. And especially with SARS-COV2 having one quarter of cases without symptoms, wearing a mask is important not only for protecting others from you but also you from others, especially when you're around others not from your household, ie public areas, shopping, transit, etc where you can't always maintain a 6 ft distance.

You don't need a N95 mask (please save those for the doctors and nurses who need them in the hospital, and if you have bought a lot of them, please donate them to your hospital!). But any surgical mask will do. Even a home made one is better than nothing. Currently WHO, CDC, and our health authorities recommend against mask use in the general public, but that will very likely change in the next few weeks as the world especially USA gets exponentially more cases.

4. STAY HEALTHY

Keep your body healthy, ie quit smoking, exercise regularly, eat a healthy diet, take meds properly if chronic illness (eg. diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, etc) so that you don't get ill from stroke, heart attack, etc which would put more strain on the medical system which is already being strained to the limit.

5. BE KIND AND CONSIDERATE TO EACH OTHER

For the first time in a long time in the history of the world, we are all facing this together, all the countries and peoples of the world. And it will take another few months or more before we can get back to normal. This is the time where we spend with our loved ones and make sure they know that they're loved.