

COVID-19 Q & A with Northeast Georgia Health System

Symptom and Treatment Questions

Q: I have heard nausea and backache could be additional symptoms. Is this accurate?

A: The most common COVID-19 symptoms are fever, cough and difficulty breathing, but gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea, vomiting and diarrhea have been observed in some patients. Muscle aches, myalgia, fatigue and loss of appetite are also very common, and a backache could be caused by the myalgia.

Q: Is it true that ibuprofen is not good to take if you think you have the virus?

A: Yes, that is true. Patients should not take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen because there are concerns that it could help the virus. Tylenol should be used instead.

Q: Would a nebulizer be helpful for someone dealing with a mild case of COVID-19?

A: We do not recommend using nebulizers because it can help the virus travel through the air. Patients can use a metered dose inhaler if they have one.

Testing and Quarantine Questions

Q: When do you foresee testing being available in our area so that everyone - whether running a fever and coughing or asymptomatic - can rule out COVID-19 or determine whether they already have antibodies?

A: Unfortunately, we do not currently have an adequate supply of testing materials for community-wide testing. Tests are being prioritized for the most emergent patients. We don't know when supplies will be available in large enough quantities to allow community-wide testing.

Q: How long does it take to receive results once you are tested, and why does it take so long?

A: There are many different labs processing COVID-19 tests, and turnaround times vary between labs. Some of those facilities have a backlog of tests, but we have recently been working with a lab in Georgia that is able to provide results by the next day.

Q: After a 14-day self-quarantine, is a return to the community a safe option? It seems this is a myth.

A: The 14-day shelter-in-place orders are designed to slow the spread of the illness, and it is critical that everyone follow those orders so our hospital system isn't overwhelmed with patients. COVID-19 will still be active in the community at the end of the quarantine period, but we will see a smaller number of patients ill at the same time and needed care in our hospitals.

Q: Is 14 days a realistic estimation of time required for the COVID-19 virus to subside?

A: The 14-day window is important for two reasons:

1. It could take up to 14 days for someone exposed to the illness to become ill. The 14-day quarantine period is aimed at reducing the risk of transmission by someone who may be shedding the virus prior to feeling ill.
2. We estimate that an infected patient will most likely be ill for 14 days. Anyone who is showing symptoms or is confirmed to have COVID-19 should isolate themselves – even from others in their home – for 14 days.

Whether or not this community has weakened the threat of COVID-19 within 14 days depends on how well we are participating in the social distancing requirements and staying at home if possible. If we don't effectively do that, the virus will continue to spread, and we will face a significant increase in the number of cases. We most likely will not be out from under this and life will not be back to normal in 14 days.

Testing and Quarantine Questions (Continued)

Q: Do you have information as to whether someone can recover from the virus and contract it again?

A: Information about COVID-19 is still evolving, and there isn't enough research yet to say whether patients can get COVID-19 twice or not.

Q: What is NGHS's plan for medical providers if they test positive for COVID-19?

A: Any NGHS staff confirmed to have COVID-19 are asked to stay home until they are well and have met CDC guidelines for returning to work.

Q: Does "flattening the curve" imply that protective measures we are taking will extend the life of the viral outbreak?

A: The intent of these protective measures is to reduce the number of new infections and break the transmission chain of the virus. This will result in flattening the curve and over a period of time, reduce the number of new infections. If we do not maintain social distancing and infections continue to increase, the number of infected people that need hospitalization could be more than the capacity the hospitals can care for. Each of us need to do our part to flatten the curve.

Q: As a not-for-profit community pregnancy screening clinic, how would it be best for us to refer or counsel patients with a positive pregnancy test that we are concerned about?

A: For someone who is pregnant, but showing no symptoms, the recommendation is for them to stay home and take care of themselves. If they have any symptoms, they will need to be tested. Patients should call their doctor or an urgent care if they have symptoms and need care.

Shelter-In-Place Questions

Q: Is it safe to exercise outdoors or walk the dog?

A: If you must be outside for something, it needs to be essential. However, if you choose to exercise outside or walk the dog, it is important to maintain social distancing.

Q: Is outdoor dining dangerous given the social distancing requirements?

A: For the time being, you should not participate in outdoor dining at a public location. Dining on your back patio with only those in your home who aren't in isolation is not dangerous.

Q: Is it safe to get take out or go through the drive thru?

A: It is not recommended for anyone in Georgia to leave their home during the statewide Shelter-In-Place order, but if you have to be outside, wear a mask, perform good hand hygiene and maintain at least a 6-foot distance from others. Do not go out if you are sick.

Business Questions

Q: How can I prevent my family members, employees and customers from spreading germs?

A: We recommend reviewing the CDC guidelines for businesses and individuals because they are very detailed, include safety measures businesses and individuals can take and discuss ways to reduce transmission. The employer guidelines also talk about screening employees for any symptoms and having flexible PTO or remote working environments for employees to stay home if needed. This includes social distancing, disinfecting surfaces frequently and washing hands.

Q: Do you have additional physicians, advanced practitioners and nurses on standby?

A: Yes, our Medical Staff Services office has processes in place to allow additional practitioners to assist in the event of an emergency like a pandemic, weather event or other situation.

Business Questions (Continued)

Q: What are your opinions on taking temperatures of employees prior to them entering a manufacturing plant or any business?

A: While fever is a common symptom, it is not seen in 100% of the cases. Early on in the disease, only around 40% have a fever. If you can take temperatures with a safe distance and establish a reliable way of monitoring symptoms, then that is fine. However, it is important to understand that the absence of a fever does not rule out COVID-19. Consider taking your own temperature every 12-24 hours to monitor for a fever; if you have a fever, then that is an immediate sign that you should sequester yourself.

Q: What do you have in place for more routine emergencies, such as broken bones or other emergencies, that would ensure those patients receive care but are not mixed with potential COVID-19 patients?

A: We are still treating routine emergencies as usual. When patients come into any of our facilities, we screen them for symptoms such as fever, coughing or shortness of breath, and if a patient has those symptoms, they are asked to wear a mask and are taken into an isolated room. This helps protect both staff and other patients. These same precautions are taken at all Northeast Georgia Physicians Group, The Heart Center and Urgent Care locations to protect all patients and staff from COVID-19.

Q: If the city or county where I live has a Shelter-In-Place order for everyone except essential businesses, but my work is located in another county that has not issued this order, can I still go to work?

A: Please contact your city or county government for direction.

Q: If my workplace is considered an essential business, do I need a certificate to travel to and from work?

A: Please view the Chamber's FAQs on Shelter-In-Place Orders and Business Relief Guidance related to COVID-19. This can be found on the homepage at www.greaterhallchamber.com.

Q: I manage an apartment community and want to communicate general information about COVID-19, specifically:

- 1. What services are being limited at this time?**
- 2. What digital or mobile options are there for healthcare to prevent leaving home?**
- 3. What limitations are being placed on patients regarding visitors?**

A: Please visit www.nghs.com/coronavirus for the latest information from NGHS including visitation guidelines, location closings, telemedicine information, e-visits and more.

Q: As a business, if our employee has a spouse that works in the medical profession and is working with COVID-19 patients, is it okay for our employee to continue coming to work?

A: The CDC has great resources and guidelines for employers online at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.

Community and Other Questions

Q: I have heard that the National Guard has been called in to help in New York. Do you think we will see that here?

A: Governor Kemp did activate the National Guard, and we will have a small contingency of the National Guard here on-site in the next few days for additional assistance with transporting patients and helping with field hospitals. We anticipate having a shortage of workforce, especially as the virus continues to spread.

Community and Other Questions (Continued)

Q: Are schools required to report that a student or parent has been diagnosed with COVID-19 even though we are not currently in session?

A: We encourage you to contact your school administration with regard to how that is handled.

Q: What is the lifespan of the virus on different surfaces?

A: There is a lot we still don't know, but a recent study found that COVID-19 can survive up to four hours on copper, up to 24 hours on cardboard and up to two to three days on plastic and stainless steel. The researchers also found that the virus can hang out as droplets in the air for up to three hours before they fall. But, most often, they will fall more quickly.

Q: We fully understand and support the decision to suspend clinicals for college students. What triggers will need to take place before the clinical experiences may resume?

A: We do not know when we will resume clinical experiences in our facilities. As soon as we have a plan for resuming those programs, we will share the news with all area schools.

Q: How can we help Northeast Georgia Health System?

A: The community has been outstanding and has already offered to help in so many different ways!

1. Donations: We now have a COVID-19 Relief Fund. Contributions to the fund, as well as donations of essential healthcare supplies, are being coordinated by the NGMC Foundation. Details are available at www.themedicalcenterfoundation.org/contact.
2. Give Blood: We are looking into additional locations to host blood drives away from our campuses.
3. Stay Home: The most important thing the community can do to help is to stay home. As business and community leaders, you are sending a huge message by practicing these guidelines yourself.

For more information about new needs, follow our social media channels; any specific needs will be posted there with details.

Q: Has the hospital approved a sewing pattern for the PPE masks?

A: Yes! Visit www.nghs.com/coronavirus for information about how to help with sewing masks.

Note: Information available on COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is changing daily. We recommend reviewing the CDC's guidelines regularly and visiting the following sites for the most up-to-date information:

- www.cdc.gov/coronavirus
- www.nghs.com/coronavirus
- www.greaterhallchamber.com (resources can be found on the homepage)

Contact Us:

Madison Hopkins

Project Manager, Economic Development & Government Affairs

Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce

Direct: 678-971-6224

Email: mhopkins@ghcc.com

April 7, 2020