

Ten Common Tips for Surviving the Coronavirus Pandemic

By Dr. Samba Reddy (USA)

(Houston, Friday March 20, 2020). Coronavirus infection (aka “Viral Mahamari”) is a global pandemic. It is devastating the communities across the entire world and forcing cancellations of travel, meetings, schools, and offices. This Coronavirus first publicly emerged in Wuhan, China in November 2019 and has rapidly spread to nearly 185 countries, including Europe, America, the Middle East, and India. The WHO named it COVID-19 (**coronavirus disease 2019**). COVID-19 has become one of the most virulent, serious, and fatal RNA viruses known to humanity, having killed over 10 thousand people so far. Despite this large death toll, more favorable outcomes are much more common. As of March 20, about 256 thousand positive cases have been identified, but fortunately a large population (89 thousand) have recovered from their infections and most current victims are expected to survive.

The virus mainly spreads between people through airborne droplets (such as from coughs, sneezes, spit, laughter, or talking). It can also transfer from infected surfaces to the mouth, eyes, or nose through direct contact or intermediate contact via the hands. Symptoms may appear from 3 days to 13 days after exposure or longer. The most common symptoms are fever and dry cough; these can eventually progress to breathing problems and other serious conditions. COVID-19 affects children, adults, and older people of all backgrounds, but the elderly (>60 years) and people with pre-existing health conditions (blood sugar, blood pressure, heart ailments) are more susceptible to serious infections. Lymphocytopenia (reduced white blood cell count) is observed in the majority of patients, but pneumonia is seen in limited, severe cases.

Socially, news of the Coronavirus has incited panic and fear worldwide, especially in the wake of rapid and uncontrolled surges of positive cases in the US, India and other countries. Now, we are fighting a war with an invisible enemy, the COVID-19 virus, that is more serious and lethal than typical flu viruses. Presently, there is no truly certain treatment for combating this virus, since traditional antivirals may be helpful but have not yet been proven against COVID-19. However, eminent research institutes across the world have dedicated themselves to discovering a cure. This week, the US National Institutes of Health announced that clinical trials for an investigational vaccine for COVID-19 began in Seattle, Washington, USA. This study will require several weeks to months to obtain results, and if the vaccine is proven effective, a few more months will be needed to mass-produce and mobilize the vaccine.

In the meanwhile, how do we stay safe through the coronavirus pandemic? Here are some general tips:

(1) Social distancing: *Avoid crowds and keep your distance from others.*

Since this virus can be transmitted through the air (spreads by air droplets from coughs, sneezes, laughter, etc.) the best way to limit its spread is through “social distancing” or keeping a safe distance from other people. Since we do not know who is infected or carrying the illness until they are tested positive or show serious symptoms (fever, cough, respiration problems), the safest option is to stay home for a few weeks to limit risk of exposure in your local communities. The chances of catching infection are higher from breathing air in crowded or contaminated places (the virus is viable for 3 h in the air). COVID-19 is more contagious than the flu; it takes 4 to 14 days (incubation) to show full-blown symptoms such as high fever. It spreads from both symptomatic (with fever and cough) and asymptomatic (no symptoms yet) persons. So, conducting a proper COVID-19 test is not as simple as checking body temperature. If you urgently need to go a public or crowded place with a suspected outbreak, use a scarf or facemask. An N95 surgical facemask is very helpful, especially for medical professionals and family members caring for a coronavirus patient, because it can better filter infected air droplets.

(2) Good hygiene: *Frequently wash hands with soap in the home, office, and travel.*

Since this virus is airborne, infected droplets can settle and persist on the surface of common objects like metal doors and utensils for 4 to 72 h, a thorough hand washing can clear such contamination. In both the home and office, and while traveling, wash your hands with soap and water frequently for at least 20 seconds. Hand sanitizers or sprays containing >60% alcohol are an alternative when soap and water are not available (such as in cars and buses). Proper sanitation of surfaces with disinfectants like Clorox and Lysol are extremely helpful to kill settled virus particles. Frequently clean common points of contact like doors, elevator knobs, kitchen surfaces, toilets, and home entry surfaces with Clorox or Lysol solution. Also, surface clean all objects brought into the home, including cloths, objects and grocery bags. A mild soap water is good for cleaning vegetables brought from the street or flea markets. Clean all kitchen utensils with soap

water and more frequently wash clothes. Avoid sharing utensils and objects with others. A household bleach is also effective to cleanse the virus when properly diluted.

(3) The face matters most: Limit contact with your face.

Since this virus enters the body through the nose and mouth (from contaminated air and objects), limit touching or rubbing your face with your hands, especially around the nose, mouth, chin and eyes. Touching facial mucous membranes – the nose, eyes and mouth – gives the virus a source of entry into your body. Face washing is helpful every time you come home from outside. Avoid visiting non-essential venues like beauty parlors, hair salons, and cosmetology stores during this time.

(4) Stock up food and supplies: Better preparation can reduce the risk.

Since frequent trips to grocery or markets may increase the chances of exposure, stock up essentials like rice, milk, vegetables, medicine, and sanitizers to last a couple weeks. In case of contamination, grocery stores may close for disinfection, so it is better to stock nonperishable food and other long-lasting essentials.

(5) Do not panic: Maintain a healthy mind.

This is an unprecedented event with big uncertainty. It is hard to predict when this epidemic will end, but do not panic or become excessively anxious, because that can affect your physical state and immunity. Most people will recover if infected with coronavirus and the overall death rate is very low (1-2%, based on age and health status). Keep a positive state of mind through mindfulness practice, such as through pooja, prayers, meditation, yoga, or exercise. Keep yourself occupied at home with whatever you enjoy most.

(6) Eat simple and balanced food: Maintain a healthy gut.

Since a person's dietary habits play a key role in maintaining strong immunity, a balanced diet is essential to combat infections. Gut microbiota, a population millions of probiotic microorganisms, can process diet into metabolites with exceptional health benefits, such as boosting immunity, combating infections, and reducing illness. The gut microbiota (good bacteria in the intestine) is key thing for good health, so strive to maintain a healthy digestive system and gut microbiota. A diet containing milk products, such as curd, yogurt, or buttermilk, is extremely helpful for maintaining healthy gut microbiota. A glass of homemade yogurt or lassi is known to increase gut probiotics (helpful bacteria). Avoid diet (e.g. spicy foods) or medicines (e.g. antibiotics) that can cause adverse changes in intestinal microbiota. Also, fruits and vegetables rich with immunity-boosting ingredients may be helpful (e.g. oranges, tomatoes).

(7) Minimize stress: Strive for a stress-free lifestyle.

Since stress can reduce immunity or the ability to fight infections by elevating corticosteroids (that suppress immunity), avoid all types of stresses such as physical, mental, and emotional stress. Chronic or persistent stress can aggravate illness, so try to minimize or control long-term stress as well.

(8) Sleep habits: Sleep is the best medicine.

Since sleep can tremendously boost a person's immunity and healing power, a good night's sleep is vital for combating infections. Adults need about 7 to 10 h sleep, while children need more. Chronic or recurrent sleeplessness can increase susceptibility to a variety of illnesses. So, curb your extended activities to get plenty of sleep that can give your body the maximum opportunity to heal itself.

(9) Avoid alcohol: Stop excessive drinking.

Since excess alcohol can reduce immunity, stop or reduce excessive drinking. Too much or frequent alcohol intake is known to affect many organs and systems involved in combating infection.

(10) Stop smoking: Stop smoking.

Smoking is known to affect the lungs, which are the main target organ of the coronavirus. Thus, tobacco and other smoking can potentially worsen the outcomes of, or recovery from, the infection. So, avoid smoking.

*The author, Dr. Samba Reddy, is a reputed medical scientist in Texas. **Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this scientific article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy of any institute or agency or the U.S.*