

Chronic Illness Leadership For Emergent Times (CILFET)

Preparing For and Dealing with COVID-19 Coronavirus

Crissaris Sarnelli, MD (she/they)

Family Medicine Primary Care Doctor and Healer

On Instagram: @drCrissaris *Please don't ask for direct medical advice.*

This resource was made for the March 7, 2020 webinar:
**COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Preparation
for People Living with Chronic Illnesses in the U.S.**

The webinar was sponsored by a new network called **Chronic
Illness Leadership For Emergent Times (CILFET)**

- To join the CILFET network or get information from the webinar:
bit.ly/march7webinar (case-sensitive)
- To share your own wisdom/experiences, suggest resources, or
voice questions and concerns: bit.ly/cilfetshare (case-sensitive)
- To donate to this effort: bit.ly/cilfetfunds (case-sensitive)

[Chronic Illness Leadership For Emergent Times \(CILFET\)](#)

I am Crissaris Sarnelli, a family medicine doctor practicing currently in Harlem, NYC.

I come to you not as an expert on coronavirus.

For example, I am not on any specific public health panels or committees.

I come to you as a healthcare provider and healer who has reviewed the information we currently know about the coronavirus, as obtained from weekly health provider calls with the New York City Department of Health, conversations with other physicians (including infectious disease doctors). I also have gained knowledge from caring for folx in my practice and also from some of what has circulated on the internet.

It is important to note there is a lot that we know about the virus.

But also, what we already know helps us to care for this illness. For example, we have information on similar viruses.

It is true that we may not have all the answers we would like right now, -- and it is also true that we have collectively all we need.

I am deeply grateful we are creating spaces where we can access all that we have to help care for all of us.

For our time together what I will focus on is:

- Health precautions you can take
- Caring for each other, from mild-severe cases
- When to seek care and how to go about it

[Chronic Illness Leadership For Emergent Times \(CILFET\)](#)

Health precautions/tools:

Some ways to stay as healthy as possible:

We don't have a known cure for this coronavirus. We also don't know if folx can be re-infected with it once they've recovered from it -- although this is likely true, based on what we know from similar viruses.

So it is of supreme importance to stay as healthy as possible to try to prevent infection.

What we can do:

- Exercise special attention to your **wellness practices:** meditation/grounding/mindfulness/stress/meditation practices
- Eating as healthily as you can
- Movement/massage as you can
- Plant allies/vitamins: i.e. elderberry, garlic, echinacea, vitamin D, C, Zinc, Omega-3
- Practicing compassion, kindness and care, with yourself and others. This decreases stress and improves immune responses.
- Get to know your neighbors and organizations in your community that can help
- We are all interconnected and interdependent. Be aware of the impact of racism, anti-Asian bias and sinophobia (anti-Chinese feelings and actions.) *For example, one of my patients lost his job at Chinese warehouse that had been affected by sinophobia. This meant he had decreased movement, which led to worsening health and potential long-term health problems.*

Basics of how to prevent spread of conoravirus:

- Wash your hands properly with soap and water or hand sanitizer (you can make your own at home and only if you can assure you are doing so properly. Here is a link that has warnings against it/advice how: <https://www.cnet.com/how-to/why-you-shouldnt-make-your-own-hand-sanitizer/> and a videolink of how to if you decide to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qWPP3kQiqI>). Washing hands with soap and water is always best. Use soap and water always if you have visibly soiled hands
- Cover your cough - not with your hand but with a tissue you can discard, or in your sleeve/elbow
- If you are sick with cough, fever or other cold like symptoms, stay home if you can. Understanding that many people are not able to do this because of concern for losing jobs/income that does not provide "sick days", etc
- Clean and disinfect your surfaces properly: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/cleaning-disinfection.html>
Cleaning means washing with soap and water, which removes germs but does not kill them. Disinfecting means killing germs. Can use diluted bleach solutions or 70% or above alcohol solutions
- Avoid handshakes: Find new/old ways of greeting (pound/fist bump, elbows, lower limbs)
- It does **not** spread through food

Who is at greater risk?

There is no evidence children are at higher risk.

We have no specific information on pregnant people. But pregnant people experience immunologic and physiologic changes. That can make them more susceptible to viral respiratory infections like COVID-19.

We know that elderly folx and people with severe chronic illnesses of the heart, lung and kidneys and immune-suppressed folx are twice as likely to have serious illness from COVID-19.

For people with diabetes: folx with diabetes that is not well-controlled and who are constantly hyperglycemic (if blood glucose/sugar usually above 200 or their a1c is usually higher than 7) are in an immune-compromised state that would make them more susceptible to serious illness. For people with diabetes whose blood sugar is well-controlled, it is likely they would have a similar immune response as those who do not live with diabetes (who have no other chronic illnesses.) Well-controlled generally means that a1c is 7 or below, or your sugars are usually under 140 (both fasting and after eating).

Caring for ourselves and each other:

Mild symptoms:

Symptoms: Fever (subjective (you feel like you have a fever) or measured (with a thermometer) and/or cough, and/or runny nose, but **no trouble breathing**.)

What to do:

- **Stay at home, do not visit clinic, do not visit emergency room.** Helps prevent illness in others and exposes you less to other illnesses (flu, for example, is still rampant and in the United States since October there's been almost 50 million people sick from it and up to 50,000 deaths.)
- **Contact your healthcare provider to ask about for help getting extra necessary medications** (if possible, 90 day supplies) to have in case there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community and you need to stay home for a prolonged period of time. *If you cannot get 90 days of medications paid for by insurance, consider using mail-order for medications or search for different sites online and apps that have different, lower prices for different medications to see if you can get the most important ones.*
- **Get and use have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies** (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms. Taking over-the-counter medication for congestion will help you feel better and also lower the risk of a sinus infection or other illness that could require antibiotics. Nasal/sinus saline rinses are also great.

[Chronic Illness Leadership For Emergent Times \(CILFET\)](#)

- **Have enough household items and groceries** on hand so that you will be prepared to stay at home until your symptoms resolve. If you do not have them, think of who are the people in your life who could bring you these things as needed.
- **Do things that help you feel good when you have a cold:** warm liquids like soup and tea, staying away from alcohol, lung irritants; eating good food; enjoying good company in person or online.
- **Ensure you have folx that know you are sick** and can/are willing to care for you if you feel worse and/or if your regular caregivers become sick; make a plan with people who need to know (emergency contacts)
- **Wear a mask** (any kind of mask like a painter's mask or bandana can work) **if you do go outside or are with others who are not sick** until you no longer have cough or fever symptoms. Do not reuse masks and do not leave them in places where they are likely to infect others who come across them.

A note on masks: those who are well should not use them. Special respirators that *prevent* infection require special fitting and testing for proper/effective use; For the folx caring for others:
- **Use gloves.** See resource for [how to properly remove gloves](#) and sanitize hands before and after use. Do not reuse gloves.

Supporting others with mild symptoms:

- Be loving and kind
- Know what medications your loved one is taking and see if you can help them have extra on hand.
- Monitor food and other medical supplies (oxygen, incontinence, dialysis, wound care) needed and create a back-up plan.

Moderate symptoms:

Symptoms: same as above, but feeling generally worse, achy, but still no trouble breathing.

What to do: is the same as above (mild symptoms).

If you are not sure whether your symptoms are severe, call your healthcare place, or Department of Health, or free clinic/"Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers (FQHC): these are places you can get medical advice without insurance) in your area and describe your symptoms and advise on what do

For these mild to moderate cases treated at home, we will likely have no confirmation that illness was COVID-19. The only way to test for it in the United States right now is by visiting a health care facility.

It seems that commercial testing planning is in process, where people can access testing outside a healthcare facility. No more info on that as yet

Severe symptoms:

Symptoms: **Trouble breathing**, tightness/heaviness in your chest, bluish lips. *In children:* ribs collapsing, turning blue, flaring nostril breathing;

Any new confusion or lethargy/inability to arouse/wake up;

any quickly-changing symptoms, like a sudden change in ability to breath or change in mental status

What to do: call 911 to be transferred to hospital setting AS SOON AS POSSIBLE; tell them your symptoms and that you are concerned about COVID-19 so help comes prepared appropriately.

Prior to visiting any health care facility, it is good practice to **call ahead with concern and symptoms** and/or **immediately inform when you arrive what your symptoms are** so proper precautions can be used.

Care: You will get care at health facilities and your loved ones may still be able to visit with precautions. They can also call, etc, as you are able to receive them.