What We Know About COVID-19

So far, the Novel Coronavirus, which was first seen in Wuhan, China in December 2019, appears to be milder than SARS or MERS. MERS killed about a third (33%) of those infected, while SARS resulted in the deaths of about one-tenth (10%) of those infected. The mortality rate from the Novel Coronavirus is hanging steady at roughly 3% of those infected, however – patients who have died were over 60 years old, had other comorbidities, and weren't admitted to a hospital until their illness was already at an advanced stage. For comparison, the CDC estimates that the current percentage of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza is 6.9%. The situation is not dire or cause for a panic. There is no vaccine for this new strain of virus, but the symptoms are not thought to be deadly if treated early.

How is COVID-19 spread?

The virus is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is believed people are most contagious when they are the sickest.

Some spread may be possible before people have symptoms and by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes, but these are not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

What can you do to lower the chances of getting COVID-19?

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to lower the chance of spreading and contracting the virus are:

- Wash your hands frequently with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 60%-95% alcohol.

- Cover your mouth with tissues when you cough and sneeze, then throw used tissues in the trash.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

- If possible, stay home when you are sick with respiratory disease symptoms (symptoms listed below).

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, especially with respiratory disease symptoms.

- Avoid travel to areas of high risk. You can view the CDC's latest advisory list map.

What to do if you think you may have COVID-19?

The CDC recommends the following if you are sick with COVID-19 or suspect you are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 to help prevent the disease from spreading to people in your home and community:

- Stay home: People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 should stay home, except for getting medical care.

- Avoid public areas.

- Avoid public transportation and ride sharing.

- Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home.

- Call ahead before visiting your doctor and tell them that you have or may have COVID-19. This will help them take steps to keep other people from getting infected or exposed.

- Follow the steps above (**What can you do to lower the chances of getting COVID-19**) to prevent the spread.

How is COVID-19 diagnosed?

A test kit has been developed for COVID-19. Premier is following public health guidelines include looking at a patient's symptoms, travel history and potential exposure, to determine which patients should be tested.

Who should be tested for COVID-19?

Diagnostic testing is being provided to patients based on guidance provided by the CDC, which includes the evaluation of the presence of symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath), travel history, contact with a confirmed COVID-19 patient, local risk of the disease, and should rule out other potential causes of illness. Premier is closely following guidance from the CDC and will update these criteria as needed. For details on the CDC's testing criteria, click here.

What happens if I am diagnosed with COVID-19?

If a patient is confirmed to have COVID-19, their symptoms and health are evaluated to determine if they should be hospitalized or self-quarantined at home.

Should I be worried about my family or me contracting COVID-19?

While the situation is evolving, if you are not in an area where the coronavirus is spreading, have not traveled to or from one of those areas or been on a cruise, or have not been in close contact with someone who has or may have the virus, you are currently at low risk for contracting the virus. Older people and people with severe underlying health conditions (e.g., heart disease, lung disease and diabetes), seem to be at higher risk of developing serious COVID-19 illness.

What is Premier doing to protect patients and staff from COVID-19?

Premier is following all guidelines to ensure a safe and clean environment for our patients and staff. We are continuing to see patients, while also working with them understand ways to stop the spread of the virus through educational information on our website and social media, over the phone and in-person. Telehealth, providing patient care over the phone and computer, is now being offered for family medicine, pediatrics and behavioral health.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The symptoms are similar to other respiratory illnesses (common cold and flu) and may appear 2-14 days after exposure.

- Fever

- Cough

- Shortness of breath

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Premier will test ONLY those who screen positive. Screening is conducted at the entrance of each clinic.

Right now, that means:

- People who are experiencing symptoms of fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other respiratory conditions

- People who are over 65 and/or with a chronic illness or underlying condition that results in a suppressed immune system who are showing symptoms of COVID-19. Underlying conditions can include pregnancy, diabetes, Alzheimer's, heart disease, cancer, or a transplant recipient.

- In the past 14 days, you have not traveled to the following states: California, Connecticut, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York

- In the past 14 days, you have not traveled to the following cities: Atlanta, Georgia; Chicago Illinois; or Miami, Florida

- This 14-day travel restriction applies to Texas residents only. If you have traveled to any of the above listed states or cities, you are required to self-quarantine for a minimum of 14 days

Where are my COVID-19 test results?

Test results are currently taking 14 days or more to return. A Premier Care Team Member will call you with your result once available.

Continue to practice hand hygiene, social distancing and self-quarantine if you have experienced symptoms of COVID-19.

You may come out of self-quarantine once all of the following have happened:

- You have had no fever for at least 72 hours (that is three full days of no fever without the use medicine that reduces fevers)

  AND

- other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough or shortness of breath have improved)

  AND

- at least 7 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared