

## FACT SHEET

### What is coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19. COVID-19 is in the family of coronaviruses (includes MERS and SARS). The outbreak of COVID-19 was first discovered in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, and is now spreading globally.

### What are the symptoms of a coronavirus?

Current symptoms reported for patients with COVID-19 have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough and difficulty breathing. Most patients have mild symptoms.

### How is a coronavirus spread?

The virus spreads from person to person through respiratory droplets. It can be spread from close contact (within 6 feet of the infected individual). It is believed that the infected person is most contagious when they are most symptomatic.

The disease appears to be spreading easily. As a result, pay close attention to the guidelines as they will change. Currently, these destinations have a risk of community spread of coronavirus: China, Iran, Italy, South Korea, and Japan. If you have additional questions about travel, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>.

### How can I keep from getting sick?

There is currently no available vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, the CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask.
  - » CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.
  - » Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for healthcare workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom;



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before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

- » If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

### **Are people with spinal cord or brain injuries or MS more susceptible to coronavirus?**

Currently, those at greatest risk of infection are persons who have had prolonged, unprotected close contact with a patient with symptomatic, confirmed COVID-19 and those who live in or have recently been to areas with sustained transmission.

The available data are currently insufficient to identify risk factors for severe clinical outcomes. From the limited data that are available for COVID-19 infected patients, and for data from related coronaviruses, such as SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV, it is possible that older adults, and persons who have underlying chronic medical conditions, such as immunocompromising conditions, may be at risk for more severe outcomes.

### **Are there special precautions I should take as a person with a brain injury, spinal cord injury or MS?**

There are no specific precautions that will protect you from getting infected other than the general precautions that we have already discussed. However, it is critical that you take every possible precaution as you are at greater risk to develop more serious symptoms and may have an increased risk of death. The most important precautions are washing hands frequently and avoiding close contact with anyone who may have been exposed to coronavirus. Patients with MS may have additional risk from immunosuppression depending on your treatment. You should speak to your neurologist if you have any questions.

### **I use a ventilator. Are there any special precautions I should take?**

As coronavirus is a respiratory infection, you are at much greater risk of severe infection and increased mortality if you acquire coronavirus. Avoid traveling to affected areas, traveling on planes or large group gatherings. Wash your hands frequently.

### **What if my caregiver gets sick?**

We recommend you plan ahead by taking these steps (source: Center for Disability Rights):

- Ensure you have sufficient backup caregivers in case your regular caregiver cannot work.
- If a caregiver does not show up for work, ensure you have the ability to get assistance.
- Have at least a week of non-perishable food in your home at any given time and identify people who can assist with shopping or delivery.
- Stock up on other important supplies (e.g., toilet paper, cleaning supplies, hygiene products, etc.).
- Identify a way to make sure you can get your medications in a timely manner such as having friends or family assist you or using a pharmacy that offers prescription drug delivery.
- Plan for your pets by stocking pet food or arranging a backup caregiver.
- Have backup caregivers wash their hands and use hand sanitizer when they arrive and each time prior to touching or feeding you.



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# CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)

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- Regularly clean, sanitize and disinfect the surfaces that are touched in your home to prevent spread of infection.
- Use disinfecting wipes on items that are frequently touched.
- Have your caregiver wear a surgical mask if someone close to him/her becomes sick.
- Urge caregivers to seek medical care if they are sick and utilize your backup attendants.

### **What can I do to prepare?**

Pay attention to reliable sources such as the CDC, NIH or World Health Organization websites, which keep updating information regularly based on new data. If you work, consider asking your supervisor for permission to work remotely if that is possible given your job.

### **What if I feel sick? Where do I go?**

Call your healthcare professional if you feel sick with fever, cough or difficulty breathing, and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19, or if you live in or have recently traveled from an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19.

Your healthcare professional will work with your state's public health department and CDC to determine if you need to be tested for COVID-19.

### **What is Shepherd Center doing to prevent the spread of coronavirus?**

Shepherd Center is working closely with our Medical Director of Infectious Disease Services and our Infection Control team to monitor advisories from the CDC, Georgia Department of Public Health and other national organizations' guidance on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak.

Shepherd Center is taking prudent precautions for the safety of our patients, families and staff. At this time, we ask that hospital visitors do not enter the hospital if they have a fever, cough or shortness of breath, or have traveled outside the U.S. in the past 14 days or had close contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with the flu or coronavirus.

Patient visitation is currently limited to immediate family members, caregivers and external case managers. If you are one of our patients visiting the Shepherd Pathways or 80 Peachtree Park Drive facilities, please call the clinic for further instructions.

### **What are trusted sources for information about COVID-19?**

We recommend three primary sources:

- [CDC](#)
- [National Institutes of Health](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)

\*Answers sourced primarily from Shepherd Center's Medical Director of Infectious Disease Services and Infection Control team along with the CDC and World Health Organization.



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