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The coronavirus, which causes a disease called COVID-19, has spread across the world, leading to one of the largest pandemics in decades. While much of the world is effectively shut down, doctors, researchers, and other healthcare professionals are hard at work treating people that are affected and looking for solutions like a vaccine. Meanwhile, isolation and the growing numbers of infected people have many people worried about how this virus will affect their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

However, the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Knowledge is the antidote to fear." The best thing the average person can do is to stay informed and stay safe. Here's a guide to what you might need to know about the coronavirus and how to avoid it. Still, there is still much more to learn about this pandemic, and new information is coming out each day.

WHAT IS THE CORONAVIRUS?

What people refer to as the coronavirus is actually just one specific type of category of viruses called coronaviruses. This group of viruses infects birds and mammals, and it causes respiratory tract infections in humans.



There are a wide variety of coronaviruses that have been able to infect people. Some of them are mild, causing symptoms similar to the common cold, while others can be deadly. The coronavirus we're currently dealing with is called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 or (SARS-CoV-2). The virus causes a disease that we call the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

If the abbreviation SARS sounds familiar, that's because it was another dangerous coronavirus that started in China and spread to different parts of the world. Our current pandemic is actually a new strain of that same virus.

Coronaviruses get their name from the Latin word corona, which means crown or halo.

The word often refers to the sun, and the group of viruses gets that name because of the way they look. Coronaviruses are spherical and covered in little offshoots called spike glycoproteins. The virus is a very simple structure. In fact, they're so simple, that the scientific community has a long-standing debate as to whether or not viruses are alive. Like other viruses, the coronavirus is a bundle of genetic material, surrounded by protective fat and protein.

The one and only goal a virus has is to reproduce itself. They do this by entering a living cell and injecting its genetic material. The genetic code includes instructions that tell the cell to copy the virus, allowing it to reproduce. When the cell is filled with coronavirus, it breaks and releases the virus to attack more cells.

HOW THE CORONAVIRUS AFFECTS THE BODY

The coronavirus primarily attacks the lungs. When you inhale it, the virus attaches to the epithelial cells that coat the inside of your lungs. The virus connects to ACE2 receptors on the cell and injects its genetic instructions. Besides destroying cells to copy itself, the coronavirus also has a dangerous effect on your immune system. Your immune system is designed to help defend you from infections and foreign attackers. However, the immune system can also do a lot of damage to your body if it gets out of control. The coronavirus can infect immune cells and tap into the immune systems communications network, which involves proteins called cytokines.

The infected immune cells send out panic signals. These communications tell even healthy cells to attack, causing the immune system to overreact, leading to confusion and disorder.

This immune overreaction also wastes your body's resources and can even damage healthy cells. Immune cells called neutrophils release enzymes that kill anything and everything in their path, including both the coronavirus and healthy cells. Killer T cells are designed to order infected cells to destroy themselves, but in the coronavirus-induced confusion, they can attack healthy cells too. Between the virus and the immune response, lung tissue takes a lot of damage. In severe cases, it can lead to long-lasting or permanent damage in the form of scar tissue. This can cause life-long breathing problems.

Throughout the battle, you're likely to experience coughing as your lungs are irritated, and fever which is a common immune response. However, the immune system is resilient in a healthy person, and in most cases, it snaps out of the confusion and starts to eliminate the virus. However, people that are vulnerable to the virus may not have a robust enough immune system to fight off the virus before it does serious damage, which is sometimes deadly. Extensive damage can wear away the protective lining in your lungs. This exposes important parts of the lung that are critical to breathing to bacteria that would otherwise pose no threat.

HOW DOES THE CORONAVIRUS SPREAD?

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the coronavirus primarily spreads from person-to-person through tiny droplets of water that contain the virus. When you stand within six feet of an infected person, coughing or sneezing can launch these droplets into the air. If they land on your mouth or nose, they can infect you. They can also spread if you come into contact with an infected person. If they've touched their face and shake your hand, it's possible for the virus to get to you when you touch your mouth or nose.

There is still a lot that is unknown about the virus but based on other coronaviruses, like MERS-CoV researchers and medical professionals can make some guesses as to how this virus works. Based on other similar viruses, COVID-19 has an incubation period from anywhere between two days to two weeks. That means an infected person can show no symptoms for up to 14 days. It's also possible for a person to be asymptomatic throughout the whole course of the disease. A study in February of 2020, studied people on a cruise ship that was quarantined in Japan. The study specifically looked at the proportion of the disease that caused no symptoms, which was around 17.9 percent.

People with no symptoms may spread the disease without knowing they have it. And people that come into contact with them aren't able to sense that they might be carrying the disease. People that feel healthy are also more likely to leave their homes and come into contact with others.

It's unclear if the coronavirus can spread via fomites. A fomite is an object or material that carries a disease or virus. Other coronaviruses can last on fomites like countertops, phones, doorknobs, and other surfaces for a few hours to a few days. It may be possible to get the virus from touching a fomite and then touching your face.

HOW DOES THE CORONAVIRUS SPREAD?

As COVID-19 started to spread, it was often compared to the seasonal flu. Just like the flu, the coronavirus causes fever, and it can be dangerous to the elderly and other vulnerable people. Last year, the flu killed 37,000 Americans, and an estimated 389,000 people died from the respiratory effects of the flu each year around the world. The vast majority of these cases involve people 65 and older. Currently, there have been 41,000 deaths from the coronavirus worldwide and more than 845,000 confirmed cases.

However, there's more to it than those numbers reveal.

The first thing to note is that the flu is seasonal. Flu season starts in the winter when people spend more time indoors in close proximity to one another. This allows the flu to spread more quickly. When spring rolls around, cases of the flu drop dramatically. There are also treatments for the flu, including a vaccine. But SARS-CoV-2 is a brand new virus, and we don't know much about it. COVID-19 is difficult to treat, and there is currently no vaccine for it.

Since the flu is seasonal, many people have immunity from previous seasons. Since the coronavirus is new, there is no immunity, so everyone who's exposed to it can catch it potentially.

The coronavirus can also spread extremely quickly for a variety of reasons. One reason is its long incubation period. The flu's incubation period is about one to four days. That means you are only likely to walk around for a few days before you start to feel symptoms. Someone with the coronavirus can walk around for two weeks, spreading the disease, before they start to feel sick.

The higher rate at which the coronavirus can spread also puts more pressure on hospitals than the seasonal flu. For instance, New York, which has seen the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, has overburdened hospitals to the point of needing a naval hospital ship with 1,000 beds to ease the issue. Still, the death toll is up to 1,550 in the state. As the healthcare system takes on the increased weight of the virus, other people that might need healthcare for other issues have limited access.

WHAT IS "FLATTENING THE CURVE?"

It's nearly impossible to stop the spread of COVID-19 entirely. Because it spreads so quickly from person to person, and it's impossible to isolate everyone, the virus will run its course.

However, the virus may be able to be slowed down to make it more manageable.

One of the reasons medical professionals are more worried about the coronavirus than the flu is that it spreads quickly, and they still don't have reliable treatments for it. That means COVID-19 cases may swarm hospitals in highly populated areas. If hospitals are overwhelmed, it could mean that people won't get the treatment they need.

The curve refers to a <u>line graph</u> that shows the rise and fall of coronavirus cases. A very tall curve means that many people get the virus all at the same time. A short curve means that the virus has slowed down, and people aren't flooding the healthcare system with new cases. A tall curve is fast and dangerous, and a flat curve is slow and manageable.

Pandemic outbreak graphs also show a horizontal line that goes across the middle of the graph. This line represents the number of cases that the healthcare system can safely handle at once. Staying below that line is vital to controlling an outbreak. If the curve rises above that line, it could mean the worst-case scenario where people that need treatment can't get it in time.

Flattening the curve is a term that generally refers to taking measures that slow down the spread of the virus.

Quarantine, shelter-in-place orders, and isolation are all part of those efforts.

ARE CORONAVIRUS CASES DROPPING?

Currently, coronavirus cases are increasing, but to be expected for now.

After China's outbreak, South Korea had one of the largest viral outbreaks in the world. But now the curve in the country is flattening. South Korea has been hit by pandemics before. The Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) outbreak hit the country in 2012, and this time around, they were ready. The developed testing kits quickly, and they started using drivethrough testing facilities. In fact, South Korea's response was so good, countries all around the world are asking them for help with their own testing.

Testing during a pandemic is vital for understanding how the virus spreads. It can also help ease the burden on the healthcare system, and it can slow the virus down. Here's why. If you don't feel 100 percent on a normal day, you may still go out, go to the store, or even go to work. If you test positive for COVID-19 during a coronavirus epidemic, you'll get treatment, and stay out of contact with other people. Each positive test is ideally another person that is aware of the problem and taking measures to slow the spread. The better we get at testing, the higher the confirmed cases will be, until the curve flattens out as it has in South Korea.

WHO IS THE MOST VULNERABLE?

As with the flu, the people that are the most vulnerable are people that are age 65 or older, particularly people that live in nursing homes or long-term care facilities. However, certain medical conditions can put people of all ages at risk, including:

- Chronic lung diseases
- Moderate to severe asthma
- Serious heart conditions

- People taking medication that cause them to be immunocompromised
- People being treated for cancer
- Organ transplant patients
- People with HIV or AIDS
- People taking certain autoimmune medications
- Diabetes
- Chronic kidney diseases and dialysis
- Liver disease
- Smokers

HOW HAS THE CORONAVIRUS AFFECTED THE RECOVERY COMMUNITY?

People in the recovery community have significant needs when it comes to treatment, healthcare, and interpersonal connection. Addiction is a progressive disease that requires readily available access to treatment services. Without treatment, substance use disorders are likely to get worse, and even lifethreatening. Unlike many services around the world, addiction treatment facilities have not been shut down by the quarantine orders. Since addiction treatment is healthcare, the majority of accredited clinics are still open and available through the pandemic.

People with substance use disorders often have other medical needs that require easy access to healthcare. For instance, someone who has spent time using intravenous heroin may have a bloodborne disease that needs treatment.

Overdoses also need quick medical care that may now be burdened by the coronavirus.

The treatment for some diseases that are associated with drug use, like HIV, might include immunosuppressants, which make you vulnerable to viral infections.

Finally, people in the recovery community rely on interpersonal connections to avoid relapse, as seen in organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous. Inpatient treatment clinics may still have group therapy sessions while maintaining social distancing guidelines. Outpatient treatment may use telemedicine to avoid person-to-person disease spreading. And community organizations may have to adapt to online meetings as well.

WHERE DID THE CORONAVIRUS COME FROM?

Coronaviruses often start in bats and in birds. They can be found in a variety of mammals and birds all over the world. This particular virus has been traced to the city of Wuhan in China's Hubei province. More specifically, a group of medical researchers for the China Novel Coronavirus Investigating and Research <u>Team</u> found that a cluster of people in the early cases went to a food market in the city. Chinese officials shut down the market, but the virus had already gotten out of containment. In 2003, the SARS virus had originated in a similar market in southern China. Coronaviruses originate in markets like the ones seen in the two coronavirus outbreaks because of the nature of putting different kinds of wildlife and people in close proximity. Coronaviruses often can't make the jump from birds or bats to people.

The version of the virus that affects these small animals isn't effective when infecting humans. You may have seen memes and social media posts attributing the virus to someone eating a bat, but it's more likely that there was an intermediary species. The SARS virus spread from a bat to a small cat called a civet to people. There is some evidence to suggest that COVID-19 went from bats to a mammal called a pangolin to humans.

A <u>video made by Vox</u> pointed out that viruses that start in China have been traced to specific kinds of markets called wet markets, where a variety of animals are slaughtered and sold in one place. Cages of animals are stacked close together, allowing potential viruses to spread from species to species before they are handled or consumed by people. Chinese wet markets have more wildlife species than other wet markets around the world. The animals you can buy at a Chinese wet market don't just come from China; they come from all over the world.

Vox explains that wildlife farming has been a common practice in the country since the 1970s when famine made it so the government-owned farms couldn't feed the population. The Chinese government gave up control of farming practices, which were quickly taken over by large companies. Individuals and small farms turned to wildlife farming to sustain themselves.

Because the people of China were in an emergency situation, the government allowed it.

As wildlife farming took off, these markets grew to include dozens of different species that would normally never come in contact. Even animals that were illegal to trade like the endangered pangolin found their way to the wet markets.

Today, only a tiny percentage of people in China eat wildlife animals, but with a virus that spreads as quickly as the current coronavirus, it only takes a few people to get sick.

SAFETY TIPS FOR AVOIDING CORONAVIRUS

To help slow the spread and flatten the curve of COVID-19, it's important to listen to local and federal advice and orders concerning quarantining and safe practices. As we learn more about the virus, healthcare professionals update information about how the virus spreads and behaves. Stay up to date with the latest information. Based on what is already known, the American Red Cross has highlighted some ways you can avoid the virus, including:

Stay home as much as possible

If your job is shut down or if you can work at home, avoid leaving your house except for essential activities. Limiting your exposure to potentially infected people diminishes your chance of getting the virus.

Wash your hands

Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds, especially if you've been out in public. If you can't access soap and water, use hand sanitizer with 60% alcohol.

Washing your hands is a vital part of remaining free of the virus. Your hands come into contact with surfaces, objects, and people all day long. And anyone who's been trying not to touch their faces recently knows how often we tend to put our hands near our noses and mouths. Keeping your hands clean can help avoid slip-ups.

The 20-second rule comes from the way soap works to destroy contaminants. Soap clings to fats and tears them apart, effectively destroying things like the coronavirus, which is surrounded by a protective layer of fat. It takes at least 20 seconds for soap to get all over your hand and tear the virus apart. The 20-second rule applies to more than just the coronavirus.

We don't know for sure whether the virus that causes COVID-19 lasts for a long time on surfaces, but if it works like other similar coronaviruses, it's likely to last for several days. Wiping down surfaces can help limit your exposure to the virus and maintain a safe home.

Stay six feet apart

When you do have to go out to get supplies or food, stay about two arms lengths away from other people. This can help keep you away from the small droplets that may carry the disease.

Opt for virtual socialization

Humans need connection, and it's important to maintain relationships through the pandemic. However, the safest way to do that right now is through virtual socialization.

Video chatting apps allow you to meet with friends. In fact, people have been using the conference calling app Zoom to throw virtual parties.

Avoid touching your face

When you've been out in public, always wash your hands before touching your nose or mouth.

Clean and disinfect surfaces

Cleaning your household surfaces, doorknobs, cell phones, and other frequently touched items can help ensure that the virus isn't clinging to any materials you may come in contact with.

Cover coughs and sneezes

Coughing and sneezing can project germ and virus-carrying droplets. Use a tissue or your elbow instead of your bare hands.

SAFETY TIPS FOR THOSE IN ADDICTION RECOVERY

Stay Connected

People in recovery know that connection with other people is often a vital lifeline in recovery. Social bonds and community connection are important for so many reasons. For one, connection drives away feelings of isolation, which fester at the wounds of <u>addiction</u> and mental health. Feeling cut off, alone, and without help are detrimental to mental health, creating negative emotions or amplifying existing ones.

Connecting with others helps you feel like you're part of a community and that people care about you.

The second president of the United States, John Adams, wrote, "Friendship is one of the distinguishing glorys of man. . . From this, I expect to receive the chief happiness of my future life." So it is with people in recovery. Friendship is one of life's deeper pursuits that addiction can threaten and with which you can avoid relapse.

Community connection also creates a support system of accountability. When you're connected to other people, they care about your comings and goings. You're expected to show up to meetings, check-in, and maintain contact. This is also true when you're employed or part of a family. If you don't show up, there's someone to check up on you and to expect something of you. This is important in recovery, and it's difficult to maintain in quarantine.

In treatment, you may go through group therapy to build social skills. You may also attend 12-step meetings regularly. In quarantine, meeting with other people on a regular basis may be much more difficult. But with the tools we have today, quarantine doesn't need to mean isolation. Social media, video chatting, and other online tools can help you connect with friends, family, and coworkers. Don't just call someone once and a while through quarantine. Make regularly scheduled appointments to talk to friends and family. Many 12-step programs and treatment centers have adapted to social distancing needs by hosting online meetings. These can help reduce the feeling of isolation that quarantine may bring.

Avoid Idle Time

The old saying goes, "Idle hands are the devil's playground." While this may be an adage that's aimed at promoting productivity, it points out an important truth. Idleness allows your mind to wander. If you're bored, your brain will seek stimulus in some way. This could mean spending hours scrolling through social media for many, but for people in recovery, it could lead to cravings and triggers.

Boredom is a negative emotional state of malaise and a feeling of discontentment. As with other negative emotions, your brain may snap to tried and true methods of positive stimulation. People in recovery have reward centers that have taught their brains about a source of feel-good chemicals in drugs or alcohol. Only through a continued commitment to recovery, learned coping techniques, and help from others can many people resist the urge to give in to those cravings.

The COVID-19 lockdowns left people with nothing to do all day. There was no one waiting for you to show up, no deadlines to meet, and no expectations. That, coupled with the stress of facing a global pandemic and economic downturn, could easily lead people to return to vice for comfort. It's important to fill your day with purpose, even in a pandemic. That could mean many things, though.

Catching up with friends, taking an online class, learning to bake bread. These are all viable pursuits that you could do from home. They'll also help you avoid idleness and boredom.

Manage Stress

Stress is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, stress spurs you to take action, keeps you alert and aware, and can fuel productivity. In a pandemic, it could prompt you to take the virus seriously, taking the necessary precautions. On the other hand, too much-unmanaged stress is hazardous to your health, leading to heart disease, sleep issues, high blood pressure, diabetes, and mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

In quarantine, it's important to find ways to manage stress effectively. There are ways you can specifically address stress and anxiety related to the pandemic. Make sure your family is well prepared, limit your news and media intake, and follow the latest disease prevention practices. If you've gone through recovery, you may already know some strategies to help cope with stress. Re-familiarize yourself with them or speak to other people in recovery about how they manage stress. There are some other important options for managing stress, as well.

Exercise is an excellent way to manage stress because it involves physical instead of mental effort. Meditation, employing coping strategies, productive reading, and other mental tasks that help with stress all require complex thinking to accomplish. When you're stressed, and your mind is anxious, it can be hard to focus on other things. Many people in quarantine found themselves glued to the news because the pandemic, the economy, and other world events were all they could think about.

Exercise allows you to do a mentally beneficial activity without requiring a lot of focus. Exercise releases endorphins, which boost your mood and may help prepare you for other mental tasks. Another important stress management technique is also important for general health. Consistent sleep is essential. According to the CDC, as much as a third of adults don't get the recommended amount of sleep. During quarantine, you may not have trouble getting enough sleep, but you may struggle to get consistent and restful sleep. With no work or obligations, you may find yourself staying up late and sleeping in more. Consistent sleep, or keeping a regular sleep schedule, helps you maintain restful sleep and avoid sleep disorders.

HOW TO HELP OTHERS

People in recovery often learn the value of connecting with others by listening to their problems and acting as their support. Group therapy and <u>12-step programs</u> force you to get out of your own self-focus to listen and help others.

This can be mutually beneficial. While you support someone else, you learn to forge connections to bolster your support system.

Plus, you never know the good you might be doing in reaching out to others. Make calls, video chat, and ask how people are doing. It will improve your time in lockdown, and it could make a difference for someone else.

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