

FAQs

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)

BASIC INFORMATION ON COVID-19

Q: WHAT IS THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019?

A: The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a new respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. This virus was not previously known to cause human illness until the recent outbreak. It is believed that the virus was initially transmitted to humans from a wild animal. Human-to-human transmission is now the most common route of transmission.

Q: WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19?

A: Similar to many viral respiratory illnesses, the symptoms of the virus mimic the common cold and include mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough and difficulty breathing. Symptoms may appear between two to 14 days after exposure to the virus. Also be mindful that we are in flu season and pollen counts are high, so there are many other causes for upper respiratory symptoms that are much more common than COVID-19.

Q: HOW DOES COVID-19 SPREAD?

A: As with any viral respiratory illness, COVID-19 can spread from person to person through small respiratory droplets, which are dispersed when a person with the virus coughs or sneezes and are then inhaled by another person. These droplets can also land on objects and surfaces around the infected person. Other people then catch the virus by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Q: HOW DO I PROTECT MYSELF FROM GETTING COVID-19?

A: There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent the spread of germs is proper hand hygiene and cough etiquette. Below are some other tips:

- 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 and perform hand hygiene immediately.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; 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.

Q: WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK I HAVE COVID-19?

A: If you think you may have COVID-19 and are exhibiting symptoms, you should restrict activities outside your home. Do not go to work, school or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing or taxis. Should you need to seek medical care, please use telemedicine and virtual care options.

Q: WILL TAKING TAMIFLU HELP ME PROTECT MYSELF FROM GETTING COVID-19?

A: No, Tamiflu will not protect you from getting the novel coronavirus. Tamiflu is a drug to treat the flu, not a vaccine. The virus is so new and different that it needs its own vaccine. Researchers internationally have been working to develop antivirals, but at the present time, there is no specific treatment or vaccine.

Q: HOW LONG DOES COVID-19 SURVIVE ON SURFACES?

A: It is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. If you think a surface may be infected, clean it with simple disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others.

Q: SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT CONTRACTING THE CORONAVIRUS?

A: If you are not in an area where the coronavirus is spreading, or if you have not traveled from one of those areas or have not been in close contact with someone who has and is feeling unwell, your chances of getting the novel virus are currently low.

Q: HOW DOES COVID-19 COMPARE TO OTHER CORONAVIRUSES?

A: There are several common coronaviruses that typically cause respiratory illness, like the common cold. Symptoms of COVID-19 can range from mild infection to severe respiratory illness.

Q: IS IT SAFE TO RECEIVE MAIL FROM ANY AREAS WITH CONFIRMED CASES OF THE CORONAVIRUS?

A: Yes. The likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is extremely low and the risk of catching the virus from a package that has been moved, traveled and exposed to different conditions and temperatures is also extremely low.

For more up-to-date information on the coronavirus, please visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus

CAREGIVER QUESTIONS

Q: IS THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC) THE ONLY PLACE THAT CAN TEST FOR COVID-19?

A: At the present time, the CDC is the only validated and approved COVID-19 test site. Memorial Hermann must send the test to the local health department, who then sends the test to the CDC. Results take 2-4 days.

Q: WHEN SHOULD I BE TESTED FOR COVID-19?

A: Memorial Hermann has a clear algorithm that is being used to determine who should be tested. This algorithm is updated continually as the CDC, City Health Department and our Infection Control department provide new guidance. As a general rule, if an individual has a cough or fever and risk factors (e.g., travel to high risk areas) or exposure to someone with travel to high risk countries, they should contact the City Health Department at 832-393-5169, use telemedicine or virtual care options to speak with a healthcare provider or contact their primary care physician office to ask questions. Individuals who think they have COVID-19 should always call ahead before seeking medical treatment.

Q: WHERE CAN SOMEONE BE TESTED FOR COVID-19?

A: At the present time, any samples collected at Memorial Hermann facilities will be sent to the CDC for testing. We will provide updated sites for testing as they become available. Please note that most people will not need COVID-19 laboratory testing and we encourage individuals to be screened through our telemedicine and virtual care options.

Q: DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO REFUSE TO CARE FOR SOMEONE WHO IS A PATIENT UNDER INVESTIGATION (PUI)?

A: Our obligation is to care for our patients. If we are using universal proper precautions, your risk of contraction is very small. If you have further concerns, please speak to your manager.

FACILITY QUESTIONS

Q: HOW IS MEMORIAL HERMANN PREPARED IF A POTENTIAL CORONAVIRUS PATIENT ARRIVES AT ANY OF OUR EDS?

A: Our physicians, nurses and staff are trained on the protocol necessary to prevent the spread of any infectious disease. We've also had teams preparing for a potential coronavirus case who have created additional protocols and have been in contact with local health officials to ensure our readiness. However, in order to minimize risk of infection and guide screening of patients who present with symptoms to our facilities, we should refer to Memorial Hermann protocols that direct our stable patients away from EDs and hospitals, where the seriously ill are actually being evaluated.

Q: ARE WE PREPARED TO RECEIVE COVID-19 PATIENTS? HOW ABOUT PATIENTS WHO REQUIRE ISOLATION?

A: Teams throughout our System have been busy preparing for potential cases. We have also planned for any possible surge scenarios because of the virus' potential to spread. We are already receiving patients to screen for COVID-19 and are following a special algorithm developed for this scenario. Should we have patients who are positive, we have prepared locations to take care of them, including isolation and negative pressure rooms if needed. However, we do not know exactly what services, specialties and/or facilities may be needed for particular patients. We will work on each patient placement individually as we do now for ED patients. We have been asked about whether we will create special facilities for COVID-19 patients. As of now, we will utilize our current facilities including our EDs. We will send updated information about screening and care locations as they become available.

Q: WILL I BE TESTED FOR COVID-19 IF I PROVIDE DIRECT CARE TO A PATIENT WITH THE VIRUS?

A: At this time, if you are exposed to someone with COVID-19 and are wearing personal protective equipment (PPE), you will not be tested unless you are symptomatic. If you are exposed with close contact and are not in PPE, infectious disease personnel will be called to determine whether or not you will be screened.

Q: DO ALL PATIENTS WHO ARE IN THE 14-DAY ISOLATION PERIOD, BUT HAVE TESTED NEGATIVE FOR COVID-19, NEED TO BE IN NEGATIVE PRESSURE ROOMS WITH RESPIRATORY PRECAUTIONS?

A: Most of our patients will be able to go home and self-quarantine. For those who need to be at a Memorial Hermann facility for any reason, infection control will make decisions about what is the appropriate facility, isolation and PPE.

Q: WHAT HAPPENS IF MEMORIAL HERMANN RUNS OUT OF ISOLATION ROOMS?

A: We are unclear about the number of patients we might receive and what their needs will be. So we will stay nimble as we always do when faced with such a challenge. We are preparing a surge plan to look at what other facilities we can utilize if we get a substantial number of patients, many of whom will need critical care and specialized equipment.

Q: HOW WILL OUR EDS STAY OPERATIONAL IF THERE IS A PANDEMIC?

A: As with any incident, we have plans in place to be sure we can handle a substantial number of patients.

Q: WILL WE USE TELEMEDICINE?

A: Telemedicine is a key strategy for screening and treating patients. Memorial Hermann eVisit and Virtual Clinic are ready to screen patients 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

While we cannot test through virtual visits, we can help keep patients who do not need COVID-19 screening out of the emergency rooms. In addition, telemedicine allows our practitioners to screen patients (when appropriate) outside a patient room.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Q: WHICH HEALTHCARE WORKERS SHOULD WEAR N95 MASKS AROUND PATIENTS?

A: N95 masks and proper PPE should only be worn by employees and physician partners who are providing direct patient care for a rule-out or confirmed case of COVID-19, or for other patients in airborne isolation, including those with confirmed or suspected cases of TB, measles or chickenpox/disseminated VZV.

Q: WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE WAY TO WEAR AN N95 MASK?

A: N95 masks must be worn tightly on the face and should form a seal to the face, not allowing air and particles to seep in around the edges.

Q: HOW MANY TIMES CAN AN N95 MASK BE USED?

A: The same N95 mask should be worn per patient, per shift as long as the integrity of the mask is not compromised. To help care for your mask:

- Carefully remove the mask from your face and place it in a specimen bag labeled with your name.
- Place the bagged mask in an area near the patient's room so it can be easily retrieved.
- Inspect your mask prior to each use to make sure it is not torn or crushed, strings remain intact and not loose, and the overall mask integrity is not disturbed.

Q: WILL EVERYONE BE PROVIDED WITH AN N95?

A: No. N95 masks will be provided to those directly providing care to a patient in airborne isolation

Q: WILL WEARING A SURGICAL MASK PROTECT ME FROM COVID-19?

A: No, surgical masks are worn by affected patients to protect them from any germs the caregiver might transmit. If you are ill, you should stay home.

SUPPLIES / PHARMACEUTICALS

Q: DO WE HAVE THE NECESSARY SUPPLIES SHOULD WE RECEIVE A LARGE NUMBER OF PATIENTS?

A: At the present time, we have sufficient quantity to take care of our patients. However, if we receive fewer allotments of supplies, we expect to have to be nimble and do substitutions for our supplies. We are closely monitoring our supply quantities.

Q: ARE WE GOING TO HAVE NORMAL ALLOCATION OF SUPPLIES OR WILL WE BE LIMITED IN THE SUPPLIES WE RECEIVE?

A: We are receiving a normal allocation of supplies. However, given the fact that some supplies come from overseas, we may not receive normal allocations. We will communicate through supply chain about our quantities received and available substitutions, as well as those areas where we need to conserve products.

Q: HOW DO I GET INFORMATION ABOUT APPROPRIATE USAGE OF EQUIPMENT?

A: Consult your infection prevention specialists about the most current utilization of equipment and supplies. This information changes regularly depending on the current availability and CDC recommendations.

Q: MANY DRUGS OR ACTIVE INGREDIENTS TO MAKE DRUGS COME FROM CHINA OR OTHER LEVEL 3 COUNTRIES. WHAT WILL WE DO IF WE CANNOT GET THESE DRUGS?

A: Memorial Hermann has a process for looking at available pharmaceutical supplies and making drug substitutions today. That process will be utilized for all changes in drug availability due to COVID-19 delivery challenges.

OTHER QUESTIONS

Q: I HAVE QUESTIONS NOT ON THIS LIST. WHO CAN I ASK?

A: You may submit your questions on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 channel on MHNOW through the comments section. Or, you may email MHCommunications@memorialhermann.org. We will do our best to provide a prompt response.