

Protecting Your Family Against Corona Virus

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As most people are already aware, the new (novel) corona virus pandemic around the world is shutting down our economies, overwhelming medical systems in most countries, and killing 1-4% of the population, country by country. The 1% rate is achieved in countries like South Korea where they have achieved extensive testing to make the diagnosis, to identify asymptomatic sufferers who are spreading it, and then isolating them and those they have exposed. Other countries, like Italy, are behind the 8-ball in implementing such aggressive testing and maneuvers, and thereby both flooding their medical services beyond capacity and suffering population mortality rates at or over 4%, including lots of young adults under 65. Children seem to be spared significant disease but can be asymptomatic spreaders. In the US, so far, 80% of those with the disease who've died are over 65 (see Figure). So, it's the real deal, not media exaggeration, as some falsely assert. The US is slowly improving its response to the danger. Many leaders and helpers are volunteering, like Mt Vernon's June Caldwell, who is leading a group of local seamstresses making surgical masks for our Rescue unit until Rescue can get them from their suppliers and federal stores. Too bad the N95 tight masks, for medical caregivers, also in very short supply, can't be homemade. Foodbanks and driving services are trying to figure out how to get their help to those in need without jeopardizing the health of volunteers, who tend to be older and thus at higher risk.

What can your family do to help? First, protect yourselves from getting the disease for as long as you can, in order to slow the spread, so the medical system doesn't get overwhelmed. Since this is an entirely new virus, no one has immunity from it. The more we can slow its transmission, the more time we have to find antibiotics that work and to develop a vaccine.

Soap and water energetic **hand washing** for 20 seconds (sing "happy birthday" twice), hand sanitizer with 60-70% ethanol, or bleach (Clorox) wipes are the core agents (for a complete list of options¹); homemade sanitizers, vodka (only 40% ethanol), and vinegar don't work. Outside your home and car, open doors with disinfectant wipes, stay 6 feet away from other people, don't pet others' dogs or cats, don't touch your face with your hands, and then repeat handwashing before you get back to your car and/or home.

Gloves, plastic or cloth, don't wash well, contaminate your hands as you take them off, and give a false sense of security; Maine and US CDCs say use wipes to open doors and other surfaces used by people outside immediate family, and hand wash before getting into your safe car and/or home. Don't pet others' dogs or cats. And don't touch your face, when out, until you hand wash after leaving a business and before getting back to your car or home.

Despite their extensive use, **masks** are also not recommended either because, besides their shortage, they are not felt to be worth the effort; better to **distance** yourselves by avoiding close contact (over 3 ft, over 6 ft is better) with others, certainly not longer than 15 minutes. Very brief is better. Masks can also contaminate your hands as you remove and/or re-use them within hours. However, if you are feeling sick (cough, fever, new shortness of breath) and may be coming down with the virus, then wearing a mask can diminish the risk of spreading it to others

Surfaces touched by others may retain potentially infectious Coronavirus for variable durations as this study shows², up to 72 hours for plastic and metal (copper is better), shorter times (24 hours) for paper and cloth. However, I heard Dr. Anthony Fauci, NIH virologist, publicly say these durations are undoubtedly overestimates because in real life very low viral concentrations, though measurable in the lab, are so low that infection is highly unlikely; his recommendations for these times is 24 hours for metal and plastic vs only 4-8 hours for cloth and cardboard. So, where do store packaged food, UPS boxes, newspapers, and mail envelopes fall? Probably mostly in the 4-8 hour range, wipe or let sit for that amount of time if feasible. Cook most vegetables, and, if you think fruits could have been handled within several hours of your picking them up, wipe those that allow it (not raspberries in a covered container) off with soapy water (apples, oranges, bananas).

My wife wants me to tell you that I'm "unusually irritating"! Yesterday she stopped to help a hunched over elderly man tie a plastic bag to his walker; she should have washed her hands after handling walker and bag. Today she and I went to the Mt. Vernon Country Store for a take-out pizza. I made her get out a wipe to open the store door. We picked up the pizza, which I carried with my shirt sleeves. Forgetting the rules, she placed her hands on the well-worn cash register table, as many people obviously have recently while waiting for their turn, paid with cash using a penny from the penny tray, and got a \$10 bill in change. We pushed the door out open with our shoulders and got in the car before we washed our hands, she with a Chlorox wipe, I with Purell. We erred in all the underlined stuff! She should have kept hands off the counter, not picked the penny from the penny pool, and we both should have wiped the bill clean and washed our hands before opening the car door. IT'S HARD!!! Hope we can improve in time to live a little longer. Please help too.

I plan to provide lots more advice like this at my now weekly, Saturdays, 10 A.M., Zoom and conference call question and answer sessions. If you live in Mt. Vernon, Vienna or Fayette and would like to be on my list of invitees, email me your name, town, and phone number (cell preferred).

¹ <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

² <https://www.neim.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2004973>

FIGURE 2. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) hospitalizations,* intensive care unit (ICU) admissions,† and deaths,‡ by age group — United States, February 12– March 16, 2020

