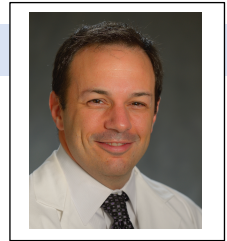


## **COVID19 Talk:**

### ***Questions and answers on the current pandemic from an Emergency Physician on the front lines***

This information is current as of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. We will update this when new information becomes available and important to share. You can also check out bulletins on the virus through the Centers for Disease control at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>



Benjamin Abella, MD MPhil  
Dept. of Emergency Medicine  
University of Pennsylvania

#### *What is COVID19?*

Also known as SARS-CoV-2, the current pandemic is caused by a **virus** that is related to the common cold. Viruses are technically not living things, and antibiotics do not work to treat the virus. This virus is also different than the influenza (“flu”) virus, so influenza vaccines (“flu shots”) will not protect from this virus.

#### *How is the COVID19 virus spread?*

Like the viruses that cause common colds, this virus is spread by **close contact** with people infected with the virus, often from coughing, sneezing or even just by close contact with breathing. That is why **social distancing** (or, my preferred term, **physical distancing**) is so important. Keeping your distance (6 feet is recommended) between anyone else whenever possible greatly lowers the risk of you breathing in their exhaled breath or being in range of coughing or sneezing.

#### *What can I do to avoid catching COVID19?*

In addition to physical distancing, you should avoid going to any stores or other shared spaces unless absolutely necessary. You should **wash your hands** carefully several times a day, and **every time** you return to your home (say, from essential grocery shopping). Regular soap works just fine; no need for expensive hand sanitizers. Use soap and water, with vigorous washing for 20 seconds.

#### *What are the common symptoms of COVID19?*

Most patients with COVID19 experience fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Most people who are infected make full recoveries, and many people with the virus have very mild illness. Some people experience COVID19 with different symptoms, including vomiting and diarrhea.

#### *Should I get tested?*

Since there is currently **no established treatment** for COVID19 (despite what you might hear in the media), testing is mostly important if you have symptoms or if you are a health care worker. If you are worried about COVID19, and feel well, **you should not get tested at this point**. We don’t have enough testing, and you put yourself at risk going to a testing center if you feel well and/or don’t need a test for your job. If you feel ill, contact your doctor about getting tested. If you can’t get hold of your doctor, there are a number of testing sites established throughout Pennsylvania. Only go to the ER for testing if you are sick and need medical attention beyond just testing.

#### *What about zinc or vitamin C?*

Currently, there is no evidence that zinc or vitamin C protect from the virus or treat people sick with the virus. Do not take large quantities of vitamins or zinc, as they can hurt you more than help you.

#### *When will this all be over?*

The best science suggests this pandemic will last for at least several more months and may peak in May or June. So, everyone should be prepared for a longer effort.

#### *Any good news in all of this?*

**Most people who get the virus do well and make full recoveries.** This is a scary time, but everyone should work hard to avoid panic and despair. Stay in touch with family, eat and sleep as well as you can. Get fresh air every day.