

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Reducing your risk



The best way to prevent transmission of the novel coronavirus is washing your hands -- thoroughly -- with soap and water, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For months, we've heard about the spread of the Coronavirus, or COVID-19, the new respiratory virus originating in China late last year.

Now that the virus has spread to the U.S., many people want to know how to protect themselves.

According to Dr. Robert Wyllie, of Cleveland Clinic, experts know the virus can be spread through droplets when people cough or sneeze into the air, or onto a surface.

He said our first line of defense is good hand hygiene.

"Make sure you do a lot of hand-washing," Wyllie said. "If you're shaking hands, or you're in public places, then hand wash and avoid touching your mouth, your nose, or your eyes. People should really become conscious of that."

If you are coughing, cough into a tissue. If you don't have a tissue, cough into your sleeve.

Experts know the virus is more likely to be spread by people who have symptoms, however, people without symptoms could still be contagious.

For extra precaution, keeping a safe distance from others can be useful.

“If it really becomes a significant problem, then social distancing may be helpful,” Wyllie said. “In the United States we’re recommending six feet, the World Health Organization is recommending at least three feet. Particularly, if we’re approaching people who might be infected.”

Some people wonder if wearing a face mask can help prevent illness, but Wyllie said there is no evidence to suggest a face mask will keep people from getting sick.

“Right now, the CDC is not recommending that we wear face masks,” he said. “A mask can be effective if you have the disease. If you’re coughing, the face mask will catch some of those droplets and make you less infectious. However, keep in mind, there’s enough room around the sides, around the nose, and under the chin, that it’s not going to completely prevent that droplet spray from coming out.”

Wyllie said one of the most common misconceptions about COVID-19 is that it is a deadly illness. He said the majority of people who have become sick with the virus have had mild symptoms.

Experts are urging those who think they have COVID-19 to call their health care provider first for instructions, before coming into the office.

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