

March 23, 2020

Dear Patient and Families,

In these stressful times, we are here to help with the healthcare of you/your child. Here is some information about the Covid-19 pandemic and how it is affecting our operations. **We cannot stress enough the importance of good hand washing and social distancing in maintaining your/your child's health.**

The novel Coronavirus COVID-19 is a virus that was first identified in China, and is now spreading to multiple countries, including the U.S. It has now been identified in this country in every state. The extent to which our community will be impacted remains unclear, but it has already changed our and our patients' day-to-day activities. Duke Health is responding with daily updates and plans for treating both COVID-19 patients as well as our current and referred patients to minimize the chance of infection spreading. Little is known about the impact of immunosuppression on transmission or the risk of severe disease. We are providing this document to answer some of the common questions you may have regarding this coronavirus, as well as recommendations on what you and your family can do to protect against acquiring COVID-19.

These recommendations may change, as we continue to monitor the rapidly changing situation. Thank you for your patience during this time. It is a privilege to care for you/your child.

1. What is a Coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a big family of viruses that can cause everything from colds to severe pneumonia. Some target your nose, so you get the sniffles and a scratchy throat. Others, like the new coronavirus that causes COVID-19, attach to cells in your lungs.

2. What are the symptoms of COVID-19, and how often does it cause severe disease or death?

Most people – about 80% or more – have mild symptoms, similar to a cold or the seasonal flu. Fever, cough, and shortness of breath may show up two to 14 days after infection. Only a small number of people, especially the elderly, have become critically ill. Some people who test positive for COVID-19 never get sick but may still be able to spread the virus.

To put things in perspective, as of the morning of March 23, 2020, there have been 15,000 deaths worldwide, with 504 deaths in the U.S. By comparison, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that in the U.S. alone, more than 18,000 people have died of seasonal flu over the past five months.

One reassuring thing for parents is that children in general do well with this virus, and worldwide few children have developed severe symptoms. This does not mean they will not become get the virus or develop symptoms like fever or cough. We do know that children are very good at passing germs on to other people, and in China, most children were infected by a household contact.

3. How does the virus spread?

Like colds and seasonal flu, the new coronavirus spreads through the droplets expelled when a person coughs or sneezes. People can also pick up the virus when they touch a contaminated surface like a countertop, handrail or doorknob and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.

4. Are people taking immunosuppressing medications or NSAIDs at increased risk?

We do not know whether taking these drugs further increases the risk of catching COVID-19. At this time, the benefit of treating the rheumatologic condition with immune suppressing medications (for example Enbrel, Humira, prednisone, methotrexate, CellCept, etc.) and/or NSAIDs outweighs the risk of stopping the medications. However, if you think you or your child has COVID-19, or that you or your child may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, please contact our office immediately as adjustments to medications and further testing may be required.

5. Should I bring my child to their regular scheduled clinic visit?

Duke Health is taking measures to screen every patient and visitor who checks in for clinic appointments to decrease the chances of spreading the virus. At this time, we are rescheduling non-urgent appointments. In some cases, we are able to provide a telephone visit. In the near future, we plan to provide Tele-Health visits, when appropriate. Some patients will still need to come to their clinic visit. Our office will contact you if your appointment needs to be rescheduled.

In the event your child or family member has cough, fever greater than 100.4 degrees, or shortness of breath on the day of a clinic visit, do not come to the appointment, but instead call the office at (919)684-6575 for instructions. Your appointment will be rescheduled, and we will provide additional guidance.

In the event that you must reschedule an upcoming appointment with Pediatric Rheumatology, please be sure to contact our office prior to your next appointment and provide us with an update on how your child is doing and which medications will need refills. We will call you back if we have any additional questions.

6. School attendance.

At this time, schools in North Carolina are closed. Please follow the plans of your school for continued learning.

7. How can I protect myself and my family?

- **Wash your hands!** Wet your hands with clean, running water, then lather them with soap. Scrub both sides, between your fingers and under your nails for at least 20 seconds (about as long as it takes to sing the “happy birthday song” twice). **Use hand sanitizers on the go.** Don’t rely on them, but when soap and water aren’t an option, use a store-bought hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Keep a bottle in the car, and in your purse or pocket. Do not use home-made hand sanitizer recipes, as these do not prevent infection.
- **Don’t touch your face with your hands.** Use a tissue instead of your fingers, choosing a new tissue each time.
- **Avoid crowded places.** At this time, the CDC suggests that people over 60 years old and those with severe chronic medical conditions avoid attending crowded locations, and North Carolina guidance is to avoid getting together with more than 10 people. In addition, anytime you are outside of your house, we advise ‘staying 6 feet back’ from people. Ideally, you would also limit (or eliminate) people outside of your immediate family coming into your home.
- **Disinfect surfaces regularly.** Clean high-touch surfaces like countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and the steering wheel of your car with disinfectant. Use a mixture of 60% isopropyl alcohol and 40% water to kill germs on high-touch objects and surfaces, like your cell phone, computer keyboard, remote, doorknobs, and faucets. Wash eyeglasses with soap and warm water every day. Isopropyl alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, and bleach can all effectively kill surface viruses in about a minute. Disinfectants like Lysol also work, though not as well.
- **Cough or sneeze into your elbow or tissue.** Throw away all your used tissues immediately.
- **Avoid handshakes, fist bumps, and hugs for the time being.** Elbow bumps are okay if needed.
- **Skip the mask.** Standard surgical face masks won’t protect against viruses in healthy people, but if you’re sick, a mask can help block droplets from sneezing or coughing so you won’t infect others.
- **Keep up to date by visiting our website as well as other reliable sources. See links, below.**
- **Follow all local, state, and federal guidelines.**

Duke Pediatric Rheumatology: <https://pediatrics.duke.edu/divisions/rheumatology>

Duke Health: <https://www.dukehealth.org/covid-19-update>

NC Department of Health & Human Services COVID19 info: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-response-north-carolina>

NC County Health Departments Directory: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/county-health-departments>

Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>

Arthritis Foundation: <https://arthritis.org/about-us/news-and-updates/coronavirus-and-arthritis-what-you-need-to-know>

American College of Rheumatology: <https://www.rheumatology.org/Announcements>