



ESTHER BUSH

## 'Coronavirus'

This special edition of the "Take Charge of Your Health Today" page focuses on COVID-19 (also called "coronavirus") and our communities. We hope this special edition can be a guide for residents in Allegheny County. Erricka Hager and Bee Schindler, community engagement coordinators, University of Pittsburgh Clinical and Translational Science Institute, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, spoke about this topic.

**BS:** Good morning, Ms. Bush. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us today regarding the global outbreak of COVID-19. We want to help keep our community members safe during these uncertain times.

**EB:** Erricka and Bee, thank you for meeting urgently to discuss this pandemic. I'm so grateful that we are discussing how COVID-19 may affect us locally and, specifically, communities of color. This is a rapidly evolving situation. We are committed to sharing relevant information with the communities we serve.

**EH:** I agree, Ms. Bush. This health page reflects our dedication to advocating for communities that are negatively affected by injustices embedded in our country's policies and systems—especially when we think about our health.

**EB:** In times like these, we, together as a community, can make an impact by doing our parts. Protecting the most vulnerable means that the healthiest people need to take action. Taking action is doing things like staying at home, avoiding large crowds, washing hands and being aware of the symptoms of COVID-19.

**BS:** Yes, the CDC says if you are not feeling well, staying away from public spaces will lessen the chance of sharing the virus, while also decreasing the spike—or curve—of new infections.

**EH:** As noted elsewhere on this page, "flattening the curve" does not mean that we will have fewer cases overall. It means slowing down the number of new cases each day. That means less stress on our hospitals. The fewer people at hospitals or doctors' offices, the better chance there is for very ill people to receive the life-saving medical care they need.

**BS:** Another important way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to practice "social distancing." We in the community enjoy hugging and embracing one another when we meet, but, in times like this, avoiding contact with people who are sick is a safe practice. We need to think about elders, including parents, grandparents and loved ones, who are at risk of getting really sick from COVID-19. People whose immune systems are weaker are also at a greater risk for becoming seriously ill. Younger and healthier folks can help by limiting social and professional outings so as not to put our most vulnerable people in danger.

**EH:** Absolutely, Bee. As we wait to see how local communities will be affected, we know that some of our community members have less access to resources to help with added stressors. Think about workers having to decide between lost wages or taking care of kids at home because of school closures, people who lack health insurance, or people who experience an increase in racism because of being incorrectly associated with COVID-19. These are mounting concerns.

**EB:** You're right. There are a lot of concerns and still a lot of questions that need to be answered. Thank you, Bee and Erricka, for having this conversation with me. Now truly is a time to Take Charge of Your Health. We hope that our readers are doing just that during this pandemic. To close our conversation, I want to include here a message that we received from our friends from regional foundations:

### Statement from regional philanthropies on COVID-19:

*Our organizations are deeply concerned about the economic, health care and human services challenges that the COVID-19 crisis presents across Southwestern Pennsylvania, especially to our most vulnerable residents.*

*We know communities of color will face disproportionate harm, and we are developing a plan to provide support and assistance that will happen quickly and go broadly.*

*While we can't predict the full measure of what this region will face, we know the keys to getting past this emergency are to work together to build our capacity to solve the problems we'll face and care for one another so that we emerge stronger and more resilient.*

• **Bobbi Watt Geer**, President and CEO, United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania  
 • **Grant Oliphant**, President, The Heinz Endowments  
 • **Sam Reiman**, President, Richard King Mellon Foundation  
 • **Dave K. Roger**, President, Hillman Family Foundations  
 • **Lisa Schroeder**, President and CEO, The Pittsburgh Foundation

# Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved.



TRACEY CONTI, MD



TAAFOI S. KAMARA, MPH



RICKQUEL TRIPP, MD, MPH

## Advice from Physicians

"Everyone—moms, dads, children, all relatives—should talk openly about COVID-19 and how all of us can help curb the disease's spread.

Answer children's questions truthfully in words they understand. And it's OK to admit not knowing an answer and to suggest working together to find one.

For example, children may be confused by social distancing. Explain how it helps protect others from getting sick. So, instead of hugs and kisses to Grandma and Grandpa, youngsters can show their love creatively—perhaps through drawings, handmade greeting cards, digital photos of their crafts or videos of their day.

'No physical contact' doesn't mean 'no love,' which is an important message to everyone—young and old—and can make this frightening time far more safe for all of us."

—**Tracey Conti, MD**, assistant professor of family medicine, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, and program director, Family Medicine, UPMC McKeesport

"COVID-19 (sometimes called coronavirus) is a respiratory disease with symptoms that include fever, cough, shortness of breath and difficulty breathing. As we learn more about this virus and its impact on our communities, it can be hard to know what steps to take to keep ourselves and those we care about healthy. The five tips below are a great place to start making smart and healthy choices that help reduce exposure to the virus.

**1. Wash your hands.** It's a very simple step that has a big impact. It is an easy way to ensure that you are minimizing your exposure to the virus.

**2. Avoid touching your face.** Many of us do this several times an hour without even realizing it. Avoiding touching your face and eyes can reduce your exposure to the virus.

**3. Rest and eat a healthy diet.** Getting enough sleep and making sure you are eating meals complete with fruits, vegetables and healthy sources of protein can help keep bodies strong.

**4. Practice social distancing:** Now is a good time to stay home and avoid groups and crowds. Staying six feet away from others can help to reduce exposure.

**5. Maintain social connections:** During stressful times, connecting with others is important. Using telephones and social media are ways to do so from a distance. Be sure to connect with family and friends to make sure you have a strong network of support.

Resources like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; <https://www.cdc.gov/>) and the Allegheny County Health Department (<https://www.alleghenycounty.us/healthdepartment/index.aspx>) are constantly updating their information with the latest recommendations and guidance. Visit these websites to make sure you have the information you need to keep yourself and loved ones safe."

—**Taafoi S. Kamara, MPH**, director, Innovation, Education and Outreach, UPMC Senior Services

"COVID-19 has a high infectious rate. Transmission occurs mainly by respiratory secretions from coughing, sneezing and even talking. Therefore, keep at least six feet from people who may be infected. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that anyone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 wear a face mask while around other people and animals. People who are older than 70, immunocompromised (e.g., people with HIV, chronic steroid use) and/or have underlying comorbidities (e.g., diabetes, COPD) are at higher risk of death. No specific clinical features can reliably distinguish COVID-19 from other viral

respiratory infections. But most confirmed cases have had fevers, fatigue, cough and shortness of breath.

What should you do if you had close contact with a person with COVID-19? What should you do if you have recently been to areas where COVID-19 cases have been widely reported? Symptoms develop within 14 days following exposure. Individuals who have traveled to high-risk areas or are in direct contact with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients should be monitored for symptoms (fever, cough or shortness of breath). It is important to reduce spread by recognizing these symptoms early and then performing immediate self-isolation with social distancing. Disinfect all furniture and objects, and call your primary care doctor for evaluation.

According to the World Health Organization, recovery time is around two weeks for mild infections and three to six weeks for severe cases. If a person does not need emergency care, such as not having respiratory distress, the person should call a primary care doctor before visiting any health care facility. Most patients can be evaluated over the phone regarding COVID-19 testing, especially since the test is not easily available and has limited quantities. According to the CDC, routine cleaning and disinfection procedures are appropriate for COVID-19 virus. It is unknown how long COVID-19 can live on surfaces. But it may survive on inanimate surfaces for six to nine days without disinfection."

—**Rickquel Tripp, MD, MPH**, clinical assistant professor of emergency medicine, University of Pittsburgh; attending physician, UPMC St. Margaret and UPMC Magee-Womens Hospital, command physician MD-12, UPMC Communication Center, EMS medical director, UPMC Prehospital

## Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### Q: Who is at risk of getting the virus?

People who live, work, or travel in the regions where COVID-19 is spreading are at risk of catching the disease. People of older age and with medical conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease, appear to be at greater risk if exposed to the virus.

### Q: What are the symptoms that I might have if I get COVID-19?

About 2 to 14 days after you are exposed to COVID-19, you may get:

- a fever
- a cough and/or shortness of breath

### Q: How can I avoid getting the virus?

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. To prevent the spread of this virus:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you are sick, stay home.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, or cough and sneeze into your arm/sleeve.
- Clean and disinfect regularly used objects and surfaces.
- Avoid touching your face, mouth, nose, or eyes. The virus can be spread if you touch an infected surface and then touch any of those.

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- CDC does not recommend that people who are healthy wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. Facemasks should be worn by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; after touching surfaces such as elevator buttons and phones; 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: I think I have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19. What should I do?

Call your doctor if you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or difficulty breathing, and have been in close contact with a person exposed to COVID-19 or if you have recently traveled to an area with ongoing spread.

### Q: How can I learn more?

- Call your primary care doctor (PCPI)
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) and search "COVID-19."
- Visit the UPMC HealthBeat blog at [share.upmc.com](https://share.upmc.com)