

Mass General updates: COVID-19

HOSPITAL LEADERS HOSTED a town hall meeting March 4 to provide the most recent information and to address employee questions and concerns regarding the ongoing worldwide outbreak of a respiratory illness, caused by the new coronavirus called COVID-19. The standing-room-only event – now available to watch on the Apollo coronavirus intranet site – focused on the current status of COVID-19, what the hospital is doing to prepare in the event it sees a patient or patients with the coronavirus, and how staff can best protect and prepare themselves and their families.

“All of the things that seem very low-tech – handwashing, social distancing – are the best prevention measures for this disease. If you touch a surface with the virus on it, then perform hand hygiene, you will kill the virus.”



Erica S. Shenoy, MD, PhD, medical director, MGH Ebola and Other Special Pathogens Treatment Center and associate chief, MGH Infection Control Unit

COVID-19 SYMPTOMS AND TRANSMISSION:

- Symptoms are very nonspecific which can make it difficult to initially determine if a patient has COVID-19 or seasonal flu, the common cold or respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Symptoms often include fever, fatigue and a dry cough, and may also feature aches and pains, congestion, runny nose or sore throat.
- As of March 4, roughly 80% of cases across the globe have presented with mild to moderate symptoms – similar to those found in a common cold. Some 15% may require hospitalization for more severe symptoms, such as shortness of breath or dizziness, and an estimated 5% will require more intensive care.
- Current reports suggest the 1-2% of people who have died from COVID-19 are elderly patients or those who have multiple chronic conditions.
- The virus is transmitted primarily through droplets of fluid, which come from coughing and sneezing. Those droplets then can contaminate surfaces when they fall down.
- Currently, it is unknown how long a person is contagious.

“This is about your safety, patient safety and community safety. Stay home if you are not feeling well. The hospital will not be able to function properly if people who are not feeling well put our patients and their colleagues at risk.”



Steve Taranto, director of Human Resources

“While there is no evidence right now of sustained transmission in Massachusetts, this could change. This is not cause for panic or terror, it is simply what the disease will do. People have been working extremely hard for many weeks now on this situation through the Hospital Incident Command System.”



Paul Biddinger, MD, chief, Division of Emergency Preparedness

PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS:

- Infection prevention is best. Wash your hands often for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your face, nose and mouth.
- Routinely disinfect surfaces, especially cell phones, pagers and tablets.
- If you have respiratory symptoms, in most cases you should respond in the same way as you would when you have a cold or the flu. Stay home, distance yourself from others, rest and contact your primary care doctor if needed.
- Patients with mild symptoms can overwhelm the health care system. It is safe to stay home and recover and not risk exposing others to the disease.
- Health care workers should make sure they know the proper way to don and doff their personal protective equipment (PPE).

WHEN TO WEAR, AND NOT WEAR, FACE MASKS

- **N95 respirators** (pictured at right) – which protect a wearer from airborne particles – should only be worn by health care providers and when caring for a patient who is on airborne isolation or strict isolation.
- **Surgical masks** (pictured below) should be worn by health care workers when caring for patients on droplet isolation or as part of standard precautions.



- Patients in the hospital, and the general population, should wear surgical masks when they have a fever or cough. Do not wear a surgical mask if you are not experiencing these symptoms.

PREPAREDNESS AT THE MGH:

- The MGH Biothreats Committee was created in 2003, focused on pandemic planning, trainings and preparedness measures.
- The MGH is a designated Regional Ebola and Other Special Pathogens Treatment Center, one of only 10 in the United States, offering enhanced capabilities to respond to and treat a patient with an infectious disease.

WHAT STAFF CAN DO NOW:

Ensure the MGH continues to function and lead for our patients, our staff, our communities and our families by following these key steps:

- **Be flexible.** Think now about what plans you can put in place should, say, schools close. Think of your contingency plans and be prepared.
- **Stay informed.** Be an ambassador for good information from credible sources – these include MGH and Partners HealthCare updates and Apollo, the MGH intranet, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and local and state public health departments.
- **Be prepared.** For emergencies of any kind, it is always good to keep supplies on hand. Visit www.ready.gov/ for preparedness checklists and plans. ■

Stop Germs! Wash Your Hands.



Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.



Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.



Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice.



Rinse hands well under clean, running water.



Dry hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important things we can do to stop the spread of germs and stay healthy.

LIFE IS BETTER WITH
CLEAN HANDS

www.cdc.gov/handwashing



“We’re very fortunate to have world-class expertise in this area of emergency preparedness. This obviously falls into the category of prepare for the worst, and hope for the best. Should anything play out, we’ll be ready for our patients, our staff and the community.”



Peter L. Slavin, MD, MGH president