

March 21, 2020

Hello Friends,

I realize you are being inundated with well-intended emails about the COVID 19 pandemic, so I will try to be as pertinent as I can. As a fellow internist and as your governor, I want Alabama ACP to be as helpful and supportive as possible.

- **We never have seen anything like this.**

I believe you know that, but there are conflicting voices out there. While we need to maintain balance between urgency and calm, we have to start with the facts. True, influenza kills tens of thousands of Americans every year, but not in just a matter of a few weeks. Compare the early weeks of the 2019-2020 influenza season from CDC data: once influenza hit over 100 cases, in three weeks there were about 700 cases. For COVID 19, once we hit 100 cases, in three weeks there were over 25,000. The potential to swamp our health care system – as in Italy – is enormous. See the [great AL.com article](#) by our UAB colleague Mike Saag, before he himself got sick with the virus. (Mike is recovering so far without complications.)

- **How can AL ACP help you and your patients with information?**

That is the question I posed to the members of our Council. Below are resource links we recommend – from ACP and elsewhere:

From ACP: "[Novel Coronavirus: A Physician's Guide](#)" that is updated frequently to reflect current information. The Guide is available free to anyone, and offers CME/MOC credit free to ACP members. A podcast, "[Coronavirus: What the Clinician Needs to Know](#)," was produced by Core IM in collaboration with ACP. These ACP resources and more general information are accessible from the following web page, which is easily discoverable by searching COVID-19, coronavirus etc. (<https://www.acponline.org/clinical-information/clinical-resources-products/novel-coronavirus-information-for-internists>). Links to relevant Annals articles will also be added to the resource page.

The AMA has good information accessible for anyone. Just search AMA Coronavirus for physicians.

Of course, CDC: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus both for patients and physicians.

Johns Hopkins interactive map: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

UAB: www.uab.edu/coronavirus. Also attached to this letter are **UAB patient information handouts** for COVID 19 concern, symptoms, and positive testing.

ADPH: <http://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/infectiousdiseases/2019-coronavirus.html>

Community Testing: This changes almost daily. As of Monday, March 23, the only one in Jefferson County will be the new UAB site near campus. Tests are by appointment only through a screening nurse phone call (205-975-1881). There will be information on the UAB website.

If you can confirm testing in your community, just let me know at wcurry@uabmc.edu or Christi at alamedgroups@gmail.com and we will share it.

Telemedicine: I know many of you are converting in office visits to telemedicine. For many, this is the first time you have done telemedicine visits. The ACP has assembled resources to help you: <https://www.acponline.org/cme-moc/online-learning-center/telemedicine-a-practical-guide-for-incorporation-into-your-practice>

- **How can AL ACP help with advocacy?**

Our Council identified several immediate needs:

1. **Close Alabama's beaches.** We advocated through the State Committee of Public Health and other governmental channels, as I'm sure many did. We are grateful to Gov. Ivey for taking that bold step.

2. Make CMS **telemedicine reimbursement** (Medicare and Medicaid) like the new COVID-driven policies of BCBS of Alabama, allowing up to a level 3 visit for telephone or virtual visits: <https://www.wvtm13.com/article/blue-cross-blue-shield-of-alabama-expands-telehealth-coverage-as-covid-19-spreads/31798770> As we began steps to advocate for this through national ACP, CMS made that move.
 3. **Increase Community Testing.** This is essential for effective quarantine and for adequate data for public health decision-making. We've made progress at UAB and plan to collaborate with other metro Birmingham health systems, but the need obviously is statewide. If you want to learn from our experience and from of our network partners at Christ Health Center (who filled the breach heroically for a week), start here: <https://www.covid19-testing.churchofthehighlands.com/> Contact me if you want more.
 4. **Consider exceptions in suspending Visa services for medical residents.** This could prevent IMG graduates matched to our programs from being able to fill those positions.
- **How can AL ACP and YOU help your community besides medical connections?**

Beyond good information, effective **social support and pastoral care** are critical for people in quarantine and especially those who have tested positive. They may need help with delivery of food and medications and spiritual help. Many pastors and hospital chaplains are very familiar with the Care Team Model, and they may just need your encouragement to deploy it.

Food Insecurity. For example, children who depend on a school meal as their only adequate meal of the day no longer have that available. Food Bank of Central Alabama <https://www.feedingal.org/> is needing more donations because of increased need. For information about food banks in your area, see the link on that site or go to <https://www.facebook.com/FeedingAmerica/> Consider connecting to churches, service organizations, or other groups to promote collections of food and other essentials to those who are in need.

Blood Shortages. Because of the pandemic, blood donations are critically short in many areas. The need for transfusion for trauma, surgery, and all the usual reasons continues. Encourage transfusion through www.redcrossblood.org or phone 1-800-448-3543. Consider enlisting in blood donations the same kind of groups as for food donations.

- **How can AL ACP help you with your own safety and wellness?**

Ironically, as everybody socially distances, the need for personal connection and social support is escalating. Whatever your best methods of spiritual fitness, we need to remind ourselves that we need them more right now – not less. Prayer, meditation, exercise, rest, a good diet – we know all the right tools. We have to use the airline oxygen principle to be fit and available to those who depend on us.

- **All of us need to be leaders now.**

Our patients and communities need what we can offer more than ever in our history. Internists are very much on the front lines of this battle – as hospitalists, intensivists, clinicians in newly ramped-up telemedicine programs, and as health system leaders. It is time for unity and effective action. Let me and our Council members know what you need so we can be your partners in this fight. We will get through it somehow, but our job is to make that better than it looks right now. More testing, better community planning and coordination, direct patient care, new medications and therapies, eventually a massive vaccination program – ACP members like you will be at the forefront of all of these in Alabama and nationally.

Thank you for what you are doing. Let me know how you need your Alabama Chapter of ACP to help.
Bill

*William A. Curry, MD, MACP
Governor, Alabama ACP*

What to do if you have symptoms of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and have not been around anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19

If you have a fever, cough or shortness of breath but have not been around anyone you know has COVID-19, follow the steps below to help prevent your infection from spreading to people in your home and community.

Could I have COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath. If you have a fever, cough or shortness of breath but have not been around anyone who you know has COVID-19, the likelihood that you have COVID-19 is fairly low. COVID-19 is circulating in some communities in Alabama but several other respiratory viruses are circulating in Alabama as well.

Should I go to my doctor and get tested for COVID-19?

If you have any of the conditions that may increase your risk for a serious viral infection—age 60 years or over, are pregnant, or have medical conditions—call your physician’s office and ask if you need to be evaluated in person. They may want monitor your health more closely or test you for COVID-19 or influenza.

If you do not have a high-risk condition and your symptoms are mild, you do not need to be evaluated in person and do not need to be tested for COVID-19. There are currently no medications to treat COVID-19.

What should I do to keep my infection from spreading to my family and other people in the community?

Stay home except to get medical care

You should restrict activities outside your home, except for getting medical care. Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.

Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home.

People: As much as possible, you should stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home. Also, you should use a separate bathroom, if available.

Animals: You should restrict contact with pets and other animals while sick. When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick; if you must care for your pet, wash your hands before and after you interact with pets and wear a facemask.

Call ahead before visiting your doctor

If you have a medical appointment, call the healthcare provider and tell them that you have symptoms that are consistent with COVID-19. This will help the healthcare provider’s office take steps to keep other people from getting infected or exposed.

Wear a facemask

You should wear a facemask when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) or pets and before you enter a healthcare provider's office. If you are not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live with you should not be in the same room with you, or they should wear a facemask if they enter your room.

Cover your coughs and sneezes

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in a lined trash can; immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 to 95% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water is preferred if hands are visibly dirty.

Avoid sharing personal household items

You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people or pets in your home. After using these items, they should be washed thoroughly with soap and water.

Clean your hands often

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water is preferred if hands are visibly dirty. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Clean all "high-touch" surfaces every day

High touch surfaces include counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables. Also, clean any surfaces that may have blood, stool, or body fluids on them. Use a household cleaning spray or wipe, according to the label instructions. Labels contain instructions for safe and effective use of the cleaning product including precautions you should take when applying the product, such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.

Monitor your symptoms

Seek prompt medical attention if your illness is worsening (e.g., difficulty breathing). Before seeking care, call your healthcare provider and tell them that your symptoms are consistent with COVID-19. Put on a facemask before you enter the facility. These steps will help the healthcare provider's office to keep other people in the office or waiting room from getting your infection.

If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that you have symptoms consistent with COVID-19. If possible, put on a facemask before emergency medical services arrive.

Discontinuing home isolation

If you have fever, cough or shortness of breath and have not been around anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, you should stay home away from others for 7 days or until 72 hours after the fever is gone without use of fever reducing medications and symptoms get better.

What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with confirmed coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

If you think you have been exposed to someone with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19, follow the steps below to monitor your health to avoid spreading the disease to others if you get sick.

What is coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease caused by a new virus called SARS-CoV-2. The most common symptoms of the disease are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Most people with COVID-19 will have mild disease but some people will get sicker and may need to be hospitalized.

How do I know if I was exposed?

- You generally need to be in close contact with a sick person to get infected. Close contact includes:
Living in the same household as a sick person with COVID-19,
- Caring for a sick person with COVID-19,
- Being within 6 feet of a sick person with COVID-19 for about 10 minutes, OR
- Being in direct contact with secretions from a sick person with COVID-19 (e.g., being coughed on, kissing, sharing utensils, etc.).

If you have not been in close contact with a sick person with COVID-19, you are at low risk for infection. You can continue to go to work and school, but should monitor your health for 14 days and stay away from others if you get sick.

What should I do if I was in close contact with someone with COVID-19 while they were ill but I am not sick?

You should monitor your health for fever, cough and shortness of breath during the 14 days after the last day you were in close contact with the sick person with COVID-19. You should not go to work or school, and should avoid public places for 14 days.

What should I do if I am a close contact to someone with COVID-19 and get sick?

If you get sick with fever, cough or shortness of breath (even if your symptoms are very mild), you likely have COVID-19. You should isolate yourself at home and away from other people. If you have any of the following conditions that may increase your risk for a serious infection—age 60 years or older, are pregnant, or have medical conditions—contact your physician’s office and tell them that you were exposed to someone with COVID-19. They may want to monitor your health more closely or test you for COVID-19.

If you do not have a high-risk condition but want medical advice, call your healthcare provider and tell them you were exposed to someone with COVID-19. Your healthcare provider can help you decide if you need to be evaluated in person. There are currently no medications to treat COVID-19. If you have a

medical emergency and need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that you may have been exposed to COVID-19. If possible, put on a facemask before emergency medical services arrive or immediately after they arrive.

Discontinuing home isolation

For sick contacts of COVID-19 patients, discontinue home isolation under the following conditions:

- If you had a fever, 3 days after the fever ends AND you see an improvement in your initial symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath).
- If you did not have a fever, 3 days after you see an improvement in your initial symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath).

OR

- 7 days after symptoms onset whichever is longer

What to do if you have confirmed or suspected coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

If you are sick and have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or suspected to have COVID-19 because you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, follow the steps below to help prevent the disease from spreading to people in your home and community.

Symptoms of COVID-19

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath. If you have been exposed to someone with laboratory confirmed COVID-19 and are experiencing fever with either cough or shortness of breath, you might have COVID-19. You can contact your doctor to see if you need to be tested. If you have tested positive for COVID-19 or are suspected to have COVID-19 but are not tested, you should follow the below instructions.

Stay home except to get medical care

You should restrict activities outside your home, except for getting medical care. Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.

Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home

People: As much as possible, you should stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home. Also, you should use a separate bathroom, if available.

Animals: You should restrict contact with pets and other animals while sick. When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick; if you must care for your pet, wash your hands before and after you interact with pets and wear a facemask.

Call ahead before visiting your doctor

If you have a medical appointment, call the healthcare provider and tell them that you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the healthcare provider's office take steps to keep other people from getting infected or exposed.

Wear a facemask

You should wear a facemask when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) or pets and before you enter a healthcare provider's office. If you are not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live with you should not be in the same room with you, or they should wear a facemask if they enter your room.

Cover your coughs and sneezes

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in a lined trash can; immediately clean your hands as described below.

Clean your hands often

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water is preferred if hands are visibly dirty. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands

Avoid sharing personal household items

You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people or pets in your home. After using these items, they should be washed thoroughly with soap and water.

Clean all “high-touch” surfaces every day

High touch surfaces include counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables. Also, clean any surfaces that may have blood, stool, or body fluids on them. Use a household cleaning spray or wipe, according to the label instructions. Labels contain instructions for safe and effective use of the cleaning product including precautions you should take when applying the product, such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.

Monitor your symptoms

Seek prompt medical attention if your illness is worsening (e.g., difficulty breathing). Before seeking care, call your healthcare provider and tell them that you have, or are being evaluated for, COVID-19. Put on a facemask before you enter the facility. These steps will help the healthcare provider’s office to keep other people in the office or waiting room from getting infected or exposed.

Ask your healthcare provider to call the local or state health department to discuss your situation.

If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that you have, or may have COVID19. If possible, put on a facemask before emergency medical services arrive.

Discontinuing home isolation

For individuals with symptoms who are confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 and are directed to care for themselves at home, discontinue home isolation under the following conditions:

- If you had a fever, 3 days after the fever is gone without use of fever-reducing medications AND you see an improvement in your initial symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath);
 - If you did not have a fever, 3 days after you see an improvement in your initial symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath);
- OR**
- 7 days after symptom onset, whichever is longer.

Additional information for your household members, intimate partners, and caregivers is available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>