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Six Questions on COVID-19
Featuring Josh Miksanek, MD

The emergence of COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on our daily lives. Dr. Josh Miksanek is medical director of the emergency department at SIH Herrin Hospital. Here are some of the questions Dr. Miksanek has fielded in recent days.

What do we know about the transmission of the COVID-19 virus?

The coronavirus (COVID-19) is a respiratory virus and respiratory viruses are very infectious and transmissible by coughing, droplets, touching your face and then touching other people's hands, etc. If you pay attention for five minutes, you might notice you touch your face, mouth and nose countless times through the day. So when we say, "wash your hands," it's serious. Most people with coronavirus are not going to have many symptoms; they may have a little bit of a runny nose. During the SARS outbreak, they were called "super spreaders". They are not going to be terribly ill and will likely just go about their normal business.

What about common symptoms and how they are treated?

The symptoms of coronavirus are similar to the common cold for most people. Coronavirus is actually a common virus family. We have four strains of coronavirus already circulating in the US that I have been seeing for years. You are typically going to experience symptoms like you might expect with a sinus infection – runny nose, headache, congestion or cough. If you are a young and healthy person, you may have no symptoms at all. For viruses in general, we call for supportive care – meaning you just have to support your body to fight off the infection. At this time, there is no standard treatment for coronavirus. Again, if you are young and healthy, that means rest, fluids and staying hydrated more than anything.

There are some treatments that have already have been tested and approved for other diseases that have been used in South Korea, China and other countries. In America, doctors

can use these treatments off-label, meaning they are not FDA-approved for coronavirus, but these would only be given to patients that are critically ill.

[If you rule out other viruses, like the flu, does that mean you likely have COVID-19?](#)

No, it's still more likely to be another virus as of today in our region, but this is subject to change based on prevalence of disease.

[What is the number of US coronavirus deaths versus the number of flu deaths? Is this even a legitimate comparison?](#)

I do not think we can compare flu deaths to coronavirus deaths for one reason: flu is everywhere in America right now. Comparing something that is in every city and in every state across the country, is highly prevalent and actively infecting many people right now is probably not a fair comparison. In terms of raw deaths, yes, the flu kills more people, but the flu is everywhere and we deal with it every year in great numbers.

We need people to think of everyone and listen to recommendations of staying home, avoiding large groups, washing hands, etc. This will help limit the spread of disease and limit the number of deaths and critically ill patients.

[What is the most important thing we can do to prevent COVID-19?](#)

From the medical perspective, what we really want to emphasize is that probably 80% of those who get this are not going to be very ill. Some people are going to get very ill from this, but they are predominantly going to be older patients who are already at high risk. If you see clinicians in protective gear at the hospital, you might think COVID-19 has been detected, but more than likely, we are ruling out people. And, so far, all the people we have tested have been ruled out. **Also, we really don't want people who are not truly sick coming to the hospital to be checked because that is where our most vulnerable people are and it puts everyone at an increased risk of sickness.** It is also the location that ultimately will have the highest concentration of COVID19 so if you do not have COVID 19 you will increase your chance of being exposed.

[What is the status of local resources?](#)

What we are seeing in Italy is a healthcare system overwhelmed. We want to use our healthcare system to take care of the people who need the healthcare system most. Unless you are exhibiting critical symptoms, we strongly encourage you to stay home and call your doctor. By doing so, you minimize risk to the sickest patients and yourself while also conserving our resources like protective gear for those that need it most.