

OVID-19 has been changing the lives of East Texans as SARS-CoV-2 has spread throughout the country. In March, the United States declared a national emergency in attempts to "flatten the curve" of reported cases and decrease the spread of infection. Since then, East Texans have been adjusting to strict guidelines, canceled activities, stay at home orders, and financial hardships. As our community begins to re-open, local healthcare and government officials are focused on methods to improve safety during this time.

In December 2019, health officials in Wuhan, China, discovered a cluster of severe pneumonia cases characterized by fever, dry cough, and fatigue, that were linked to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, in Wuhan, Hubei, China (Huang et al., 2020). Subsequent investigations uncovered a novel, human coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2 as the virus causing the infection. Since that time, the infection has rapidly spread throughout 25 countries and has resulted in a national pandemic affecting the entire United States.

The pandemic has resulted in unprecedented restrictions, many of which were fueled by fear generated by media broadcasts. Since the virus was new, researchers had little data on transmission, infection rates, and/or treatment interventions. This, coupled with the rapid spread of infection, resulted in a higher than average death rate associated with the virus in the hardest hit "hot spots" of the United States, further inciting fear throughout the nation.

Scientists and medical professions are currently working toward a vaccine for the Coronavirus. Regardless of when the vaccine becomes available, it is important to understand that the Coronavirus will not be eradicated. This means that East Texas will be dealing with the virus for years to come.

### Below are 4 things that all East Texans should know about the Coronavirus.

#### 1) Disease statistics are rapidly evolving.

As research studies are conducted throughout the nation, statistical data for the coronavirus rapidly evolves (Yuan et al., 2020). The World Health Organization reported an overall death rate of 3.4% worldwide as of March 2020. Some of the hardest-hit areas reported a significantly higher death rate. New York reported a death rate that was 6 times the normal

# PANDEMIC:

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level as of April 2020. Texas has reported one of the lowest death rates for COVID-19 in the United States. The current death rate for CO-VID-19 is approximately 1.4% indicating that 98.6% of those infected will recover.

Data may be misleading at the time of reporting due to inconsistencies with data collection. Death rates are calculated from cumulative deaths and detected cases. This does not account for undetected cases, where a person is

infected but does not exhibit symptoms of infection. A recent study conducted in New York found that a larger population of citizens had COVID antibodies indicating prior infection despite clinical symptoms. This data has led to a decrease in the death rate determined from original projections at the start of the pandemic.

# Avoid wearing gloves in public settings as this increases the spread of infection.

Moreover, the number of confirmed cases will change daily and the impact of the disease will affect each state differently. East Texas could see a spike in COVID-19 cases as our communities begin to loosen social distancing restrictions and stay at home orders.

#### 2) Most people have mild illness.

Although the virus may be deadly for some East Texans, most individuals will experience mild disease and may recover in their homes without additional medical care. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recently expanded the list of possible symptoms of COVID-19. Most people develop symptoms approximately 6 days after exposure; however, symptoms can appear anywhere between 2 to 14 days following viral exposure. Seek prompt medical attention if you experience difficulty breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or ability to arouse, or bluish lips or face. Please refer to the list below for the common symptoms associated with Coronavirus infection.

### common symptoms

- 1. Shortness of breath and/or 6. Headaches difficulty breathing
- 2. Fever or chills
- 3. Cough
- 4. Fatigue
- 5. Muscle or body aches
- 7. Loss of taste/smell
- 8. Sore throat 9. Congestion
- 10. Nausea/Vomiting
- 11. Diarrhea

# 4 things East Texans should know about the Coronavirus outbreak.

You should call your physician or healthcare provider for advice if you experience these symptoms, especially if you have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or live in an area with the ongoing spread of the disease. Your physician can provide additional information to you regarding testing and treatment options.

#### 3) Social distancing is important.

Even though symptoms may be mild, East Texans cannot forgo the use of social distancing, proper hand hygiene practices, and infection control measures to decrease the spread of infection. Social distancing is defined as the mindful practice of reducing close contact between individuals. According to the Centers for Disease Control, social distancing requires individuals to (1) refrain from congregate social settings, (2) avoid mass gatherings, and (3) maintain a distance of 6 feet or more from others if possible (WHO, 2020).

Social distancing helps to decrease the spread of infection within the community (Wu et al., 2020). Many illnesses, like COVID-19, are spread through activities such as coughing, sneezing, and other close contact activities. By minimizing contact with others, we can decrease the spread of infection throughout the community.

### 4) Disease transmission can be reduced through infection control processes.

Experts agree that handwashing is the number one method to reduce the transmission of infection (WHO, 2020). Hands that are visibly soiled should be cleansed with soap and water. Otherwise, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is an appropriate alternative if used correctly.

Hands should be washed before eating/drinking and after restroom breaks. Additionally, hands should be washed frequently throughout the day when touching communal objects.

## Additional strategies recommended by the **CDC** include the following:

- Stay home if you have symptoms of COVID-19. Speak to your physician or another healthcare provider regarding the need to self-quarantine for the duration of the incubation period. If you have a positive COVID-19 test, you will need to self-quarantine in your home for 14 days.
- Avoid touching your nose, eyes, and mouth. Use tissues to cover your cough or sneeze and then dispose of the soiled tissue in an appropriate waste receptacle.
- · Avoid sharing food and beverages with others, even members of
- · Use a disinfectant solution to disinfect doorknobs, light switches, desk, toilets, cell phones, or other frequently used objects (CDC,
- If disinfectant solutions are difficult to obtain due to supply shortages, household cleansers can be used as an alternative to clean surfaces.

- · Create a plan to address sick members of the household. Identify a location in the home where the sick person may guarantine away from other members of the family.
- · Wear a cloth face mask in a public setting where social distancing is difficult. Cloth masks are not designed to prevent infection but they have been proven useful to decrease the spread of infection in the community. Face masks can decrease the risk of transmission in individuals that do not experience symptoms of infection (Cheng et al., 2020).
- Avoid wearing gloves in public settings as this increases the spread of infection. Keep hand sanitizer in your purse or vehicle and cleanse your hands before getting in your vehicle. This will decrease the risk of disease transmission to yourself and your family members.
- Teach children about the strategies recommended by the CDC and practice good infection control measures in your own home.
- Have small or school-aged children participate in frequent handwashing and infection control practices to develop good hygiene practices that will continue when schools resume normal activities.

Additional information regarding current standards, practices, and information related to the local spread of COVID-19 can be obtained through local county health departments or through the Centers for Disease Control Website.

