




Combatting The Coronavirus: Keep Calm and Stay Vigilant By Taking Precautions

by Elizabeth Sindelar-Loy
March 6 2020 3:20 PM





EDWARDSVILLE - For a large amount of people, the word, pandemic, can sound awfully frightening and downright intimidating. It conjures up visions of people in hooded, full protective suits while patients stay behind clear plastic zip-up curtains. Not sure about you, but each time I hear it used on the news, I envision the 1995 movie Outbreak that was based on a fictional Ebola like virus.

With CoVid-19 Coronavirus coming to our communities, despite what is on social media or sensationalized in the news, we have to prioritize staying rational, keeping calm, strengthening our immune systems all while being vigilant by taking precautions that keep viruses from spreading.

First off, we have to dispel any rumors that this has anything to do with our upcoming divisive election. Mother Nature always finds a way. We learned that from the Jurassic Park franchise. Our fast-paced, lack of sleep, no exercise, high-stress, bodies fueled with processed foods leaves us to be sitting ducks for new invaders. With an increase in the number of chronic health issues greatly increasing among humans, we are giving viruses good host bodies to invade. Our immune systems are weakening making it harder to keep the herd strong.

Second, our world has become incredibly interconnected through the ease of travel. This is important to understand because every virus has an incubation period. This is the time when germs have invaded the body but symptoms have yet to show. With colds, flus and coronaviruses, this is usually the time illness gets spread to strangers and those we love. With CoVid-19, there is data that shows symptoms can show within 2 days or up to 14 days. Therefore, if we learn anything from our current situation, it's time we start being our own health advocates by practicing preventative care.

Lastly, CoVid-19 being called a pandemic doesn't mean we all have to go into full-blown panic mood. It just means we have to understand why it's being classified as such. According to the World Health Organization, an outbreak is the occurrence of disease cases in excess of what's normally expected. An epidemic is more than a normal number of cases of a particular illness, specific health-related behaviors or other health-related events in a community or region. And a pandemic is defined as the "worldwide spread" of a new disease where the whole world's population will likely be exposed to this infection and potentially a portion of them will fall sick.

Therefore, just because a disease is labeled a pandemic doesn't mean it will bring blockbuster movie-esque consequences. Although, the media loves to sensationalize

health issues (especially when it can sway election agendas), CoVid-19 is not Ebola, SARS or the Black Plague. Its symptoms and effects on the body are very similar to the flu. Yes, it can be deadly but any virus, bacteria or disease can be deadly in a body with a compromised immune system. Actually, colds and flus are coronaviruses too. They are in the same family. CoVid-19 is just a newly discovered strain that originated in animals. And with any newly discovered virus, it takes a while to learn symptomology and incubation periods. Hence, why it's incredibly important to not let our fear of the unknown make us stop being rational humans.

Throughout our history the response to epidemics and pandemics have propagated fear and erratic behavior – like we are witnessing now. Even though we have found cures to pandemics in the past, stigma and government policies have kept their effects present in our societies and psyche long after they have ended. Which is exactly why the word pandemic is conjuring up a great deal of anxiety and panic in people. We are witnessing the effect that regardless of actual exposure to the disease, the stress of media news and the fear of injury or death is contributing to misinformation being shared. This is a dangerous practice because it can lead to mental health breakdowns (which weaken the immune system).

Even though it's unnerving to know our immune systems aren't functioning at optimal levels, due to our advancements in medicine, we are still far more prepared for epidemics and pandemics than we were in the past. There are amazing systems in place within our health departments where people have trained extensively for these situations. On top of that, we have the ability to stay informed in order to mitigate fears as long as we stick to trusted sources like county and state health departments or the US Centers for Disease Control.

Continuing to spread misinformation on social media is actually far more dangerous than the virus itself. By spreading false memes that seem amusing, all you are doing is further propagating fear and encouraging erratic behavior – effecting mental health and withholding people from getting help they need. Instead, spread vital tips on the importance of strengthening our immune systems and precautions that can be taken.

The most important thing any of us can do individually is to keep yourself and your family as healthy as possible by practicing preventative wellness. This includes: movement (exercise), eating a healthy diet that includes foods that prevent further inflammation in the body, getting quality sleep, drinking lots of water to flush out germs and managing stress. For your mental health, it's advised to take breaks from social media or the news if you feel it's causing you further anxiety or seek professional help. And of course, implement the most basic steps that prevent you from being a human dispenser of germs like covering your mouth when you sneeze and washing your hands for 20 seconds frequently throughout the day. Oh and just breathe, if Hollywood

blockbusters have taught us anything, it's the characters that stay calm and rational that make it through the "disaster" (wink, wink).

Elizabeth Sindelar-Loy is the Wellness Coach for Main Street Chiropractic in Edwardsville. She has worked in traditional and holistic health care for over 9 years. Ms. Loy is a motivational wellness speaker and participates in eleven Madison County Coalitions. As a single mom to an ambitious little girl, she understands the importance of practicing self-care to achieve balance in personal and professional growth.

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