

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

UPDATED GUIDANCE FOR FINANCIAL PROFESSIONALS

BILL LLOYD, MD

Health Director
Transamerica Advanced Markets

Fresh information regarding the novel coronavirus outbreak is emerging as rapidly as the disease is spreading. With each passing day, there are new discoveries regarding the behavior of the virus and how the infection is transmitted.

At the beginning of 2020, it appeared the local spread of the novel coronavirus was China's problem. Since then, the global community has been awakened to the enormous scope of this public health challenge. Transamerica has prepared this information update to assist financial professionals in answering questions from clients and business associates.

WHAT IS SARS-COV-2 AND COVID-19?

In December 2019, an alarming increase in the number of severe respiratory infections was reported in the city of Wuhan, China. Laboratory scientists raced to identify its precise cause.^{1,2} They determined an unusual strain of coronavirus was the responsible pathogen. ("Corona" is the Latin word for crown. Rounded "crowns" on the surface of these virus particles account for its name.) We've known about coronaviruses for a long time. There are many different coronavirus strains. They are the most frequent cause of the common cold, seasonal flu, rabies, even Ebola! COVID-19 infections are usually well-tolerated with a predictable, rapid recovery. Other coronaviruses have been implicated in previous global viral outbreaks. You may recall concern over SARS (serious acute respiratory syndrome, 2003) and MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome, 2012).¹ In both situations, different strains of coronaviruses were to blame. Both diseases originated in China and, in both instances, the virus had been transmitted from bats to humans. The current, novel coronavirus from Wuhan has many genetic similarities to the SARS virus, and so it has been named "SARS-CoV-2." The correct terminology for SARS-CoV-2 infection is COVID-19.³

HOW IS SARS-COV-2 SPREAD?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), SARS-CoV-2 is spread from person to person, and people must usually be within a radius of six feet. The virus is propelled into the atmosphere within tiny liquid droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes, much like influenza and other respiratory viruses spread.¹⁻⁴ This novel coronavirus also spreads by physical contact with infected individuals, contaminated surfaces or objects, followed by touching the nose or mouth. According to the CDC, the main route is person-to-person spread.¹⁻⁴





The incubation period between exposure and active infection is between five and 10 days. Those infected with SARS-CoV-2 appear to be most contagious when they have symptoms like fever, cough, shortness of breath, and a runny nose. Some infected persons may also be able to spread the virus before they show symptoms of the disease — or never have any symptoms.^{1,2} Extensive studies are underway to confirm precisely all ways by which this novel coronavirus spreads.

AT-RISK POPULATIONS

Severe complications from COVID-19 arise in individuals who develop viral pneumonia. The virus appears to be attached to the human respiratory system, and the presence of the virus in the human body can trigger profound inflammation within lung tissue, making it difficult for people to breathe. Current data suggest up to 20% of those symptomatic with SARS-CoV-2 infection may develop a severe case of COVID-19 requiring hospitalization and aggressive medical interventions, like assisted respiratory support with oxygen and a mechanical ventilator.² Approximately 1% of known symptomatic cases result in death.^{1,2}

Exposure to SARS-CoV-2 is the greatest risk factor for contracting COVID-19. Simply stated, if you're not exposed to the novel coronavirus you will not become infected. This is why social distancing and self-isolation is so valuable in reducing the number of new infections.

We now know the key risk factors for anyone developing serious complications with COVID-19 infection include an age greater than 65 years, pre-existing pulmonary diseases, and impaired immunity from any cause (e.g., immunosuppressive medications, HIV/AIDS, cancer chemotherapy, etc.). Individuals with abnormally low white blood cell counts for any reason also have trouble fighting the infection.^{1,3} Healthy individuals who are nonsmokers and under the age of 50 are far less likely to experience severe illness with COVID-19.

PROTECTING YOURSELF AND YOUR LOVED ONES

SARS-CoV-2 is more infectious than the seasonal flu virus. An individual exposed to SARS-CoV-2 may become infected and the virus will begin to replicate in its new host. It's essential to recognize that infection doesn't necessarily mean the person will become clinically sick.^{1,2} Many people who have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 report no cold or flu-like symptoms whatsoever. That poses an additional challenge in efforts to control the spread of COVID-19. Laboratory testing is available for individuals with symptoms once approved by a health care provider. COVID-19 testing is not recommended for healthy individuals with no symptoms.⁴ The greatest risk of contracting COVID-19 in the United States appears to be among healthcare workers and others who care for individuals who are already infected.^{4,5} The CDC recommends everyone practice the familiar protective measures that apply to every cold and flu season: using disposable tissues when coughing or sneezing, frequent handwashing in warm, soapy water, use of antimicrobial hand sanitizers when handwashing is unavailable, and avoiding contact with people who have cold and flu symptoms.^{3,5} Individuals with upper respiratory symptoms should self-isolate at home and wear a mask to protect others from infection. CDC recommends the use of a cloth face cover (not a facemask intended for health care workers), for individuals out in public to protect others from asymptomatic carriers of novel coronavirus.⁶ Those who require enhanced protection, such as those caring for others with COVID-19, should wear a snug-fitting NIOSH-approved N95 respirator.¹ There is no specific medical treatment for COVID-19 and no vaccine is yet available.^{1,2}

The topic of vaccines deserves special emphasis. Although the current quadrivalent seasonal flu vaccine ("flu shot") does not confer immunity against SARS-CoV-2, all eligible Americans are encouraged to get vaccinated since the health risks of seasonal flu and its potential complications are far higher. The CDC estimates up to 61,000 Americans die annually from seasonal flu complications.⁷

IS NOW THE TIME TO PANIC?

People are genuinely concerned about the potential of a global COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to previous disease outbreaks, the scientific community has a much firmer grip on the biologic characteristics and behavior of the causative coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. Knowledge is the antidote to anxiety, and that includes worries about this novel coronavirus pandemic. Individuals who become infected who are without the risk factors for COVID-19 viral pneumonia usually recover fully. Attention needs to be focused on limiting the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and protecting those most at risk of serious complications.

Doctor Lloyd is a licensed physician and a board-certified surgeon and pathologist. As Health Director for Transamerica Advanced Markets, he provides valuable medical expertise for Transamerica's Wealth + HealthSM thought leadership initiative.

¹ "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)," by Kenneth McIntosh, UpToDate, Mar. 20, 2020

² "Update: Public Health Response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak — United States," by Daniel B. Jernigan, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 2020; 69(8): 216-219. Mar. 21, 2020

³ "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Frequently Asked Questions and Answers," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed Mar. 21, 2020 online.

⁴ "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Summary," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mar. 21, 2020

⁵ "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the U.S.," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mar. 21, 2020

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. How to Protect Yourself. Accessed 04/06/2020 online <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Disease Burden of Influenza. Accessed 03/21/2020 online <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/index.html>

Transamerica Resources, Inc. is an Aegon company and is affiliated with various companies which include, but are not limited to, insurance companies and broker dealers. Transamerica Resources, Inc. does not offer insurance products or securities. The information provided is for educational purposes only and should not be construed as insurance, securities, tax, legal or financial advice or guidance. Please consult your personal independent advisors for answers to your specific questions.