



BLACK PATIENTS' GUIDE TO COVID-19

BY DR. RUTH ARUMALA, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH COLOR OF CHANGE

On constant loops on every news outlet and social media feed is the looming risk of contracting the novel “Coronavirus” and the developing life-threatening COVID-19 disease. With no available vaccination and only experimental disease-fighting drugs available, the highly contagious virus has produced an unprecedented worldwide pandemic.

Unfortunately, in the United States there are recent reports from various metropolitan areas such as New Orleans and Chicago that the virus disproportionately results in severe disease and mortality in Black people. In order to adequately combat this disparity, Black Americans must be armed with accurate knowledge about the viral illness and ways to navigate the current healthcare environment.



MYTHS VS. FACTS

MYTH: The Coronavirus does not affect Black People.

FACT: False. The Coronavirus is impacting Black Americans at higher rates and resulting in more severe disease. In Louisiana for example, Black Americans make up 32% of the population, yet comprise 70% of Coronavirus deaths. In Chicago, Black people are dying at six times the rate that of white people. Similar disparities are occurring all over the country.¹

MYTH: The Coronavirus only affects older, sick individuals.

FACT: False. There have been reports of infants as young as four months old with severe symptoms of COVID-19. And one of the most heartbreaking U.S. deaths occurred when five year old, Skylar Herbert passed away in Detroit.²

MYTH: If I wear a mask, I do not have to practice social distancing.

FACT: False. In order to adequately protect yourself and others from the Coronavirus, you should continue to practice social distancing, while also adhering to the new CDC recommendations to wear masks that cover your mouth and nose.

¹“The coronavirus is affecting and killing black Americans at alarming rates,” Washington Post, 7 April 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/04/07/coronavirus-is-infecting-killing-black-americans-an-alarmingly-high-rate-post-analysis-shows/?arc404=true>

²“5-year-old daughter of Detroit first responders dies after being diagnosed with coronavirus,” CNN, 21 April 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/21/us/detroit-girl-dies-coronavirus/index.html>



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BEST PRACTICES WHEN YOU SUSPECT YOU OR YOUR LOVED ONE HAS COVID-19:

The known symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, chills, muscle aches, difficulty breathing, loss of taste and or smell, nausea, vomiting, and a change in bowel movements--particularly diarrhea. Although these can also be symptoms of the common cold, influenza infection or seasonal allergies, we need to proceed with caution during the peak or near peak of the coronavirus pandemic.

If you are experiencing these symptoms:

- Call your health provider.
- Be very specific about your symptoms.
- If there are any known contacts that have tested positive for the Coronavirus, immediately disclose that information to your provider.
- Include any underlying health conditions and what you do for a living — especially if you are public-facing, an essential worker, or have not been able to “shelter in place.”
- If you are experiencing persistent fevers and sustained shortness of breath, please present to the nearest emergency department. This indicates severe disease.



If you are sent to an emergency room or urgent care, be sure to include the following inquires about your care

- Specifically ask to be tested for COVID-19 and indicate any underlying health conditions.
- If you are given an alternative diagnosis, ask if you should self-quarantine, as well as the specific amount of time you should remain in self-quarantine.
- Ask your provider if you should replace personal hygiene items like toothbrushes or pillow cases.
- Ask your ER provider if a chest X-Ray is indicated.



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- Set a follow-up appointment with your provider with a specific date which can be done via telemedicine. As a general rule, everyone seen in the hospital should follow up with a provider in 7-14 days.
- Do not leave the emergency room without having all of your questions answered and having a good sense of the severity of your symptoms.

If you feel that your symptoms are not being taken seriously:

- Be persistent. Reiterate your symptoms and any underlying health conditions in a calm manner.
- Share your fear, anxiety and mental anguish about contracting the virus and developing the disease.
- Ask for denial of a test to be noted in your chart.
- Ask the provider if they have access to tests. If they do not, ask for the closest testing location.



Although the novel coronavirus and COVID-19 pandemic can produce significant anxiety and trepidation, there are ways to successfully prevent and navigate this disease. Please do your part to stay at home, wash your hands frequently, clean hard surfaces several times per day, wear face coverings when in public, and maintain social distancing (> 6 feet from others) when in public.

Dr. Ruth Arumala, DO, MPH, NCMP, is a Texas-based physician who practices a patient-centered approach to care which seeks to not only provide excellent medical care but to empower her patients to make healthier choices that enable them to live a happier, more fulfilling life. Dr. Arumala has won several awards that demonstrate her exceptional clinical skills and service to her community. These include 2020 National Minority Quality Forum's 40 Under 40 Leaders in Minority Health, 2020 Fort Worth Magazine "Top Docs" Tarrant County, OB-Gyn, 2020 Texas Super Doctors Rising Stars, and 2020 Women in Medicine's "Top OB-Gyn" Fort Worth. You can follow her on Instagram at @i.am.dr.arumala and listen to her podcast "Pretty + Pink Podcast: A Modern Woman's Guide to Health" anywhere podcasts are streamed.