

Guidelines covering the COVID-19 virus threat. (March 2020)

Symptoms of COVID-19:

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell. Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

How does COVID-19 spread?

People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs or exhales. These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. People can also catch COVID-19 if they breathe in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs out or exhales droplets. This is why it is important to stay more than 1 meter (3 feet) away from a person who is sick.

Self-Isolation

Self-isolate by staying at home if you begin to feel unwell, even with mild symptoms such as headache, fever and slight runny nose, until you recover. If it is essential for you to have someone bring you supplies or to go out, e.g. to buy food to avoid infecting other people.

- If you've developed a cough or fever in the last 7 days you should self-isolate for 7 days from the day your symptoms started.
- You can return to work after 7 days if you're improving.
- If you develop fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical advice promptly as this may be due to a respiratory infection or other serious condition. Call in advance and tell your provider of any recent travel or contact with travellers.

How long is the incubation period for COVID-19?

The "incubation period" means the time between catching the virus and beginning to have symptoms of the disease. Most estimates of the incubation period for COVID-19 range from 1-14 days, most commonly around five days. These estimates will be updated as more data become available.

How long does the virus survive on surfaces?

Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

Advice for Assembly gatherings during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The doctors who have assembled the advice on which the following points are based are:

- David Vallance MD (Livonia, Michigan)
- Scott Yaekle MD (Livonia, Michigan)
- Michael Renzi DO (Barrington, NJ)
- Ricardo Castro MD (Santiago, Chile)
- Alexander Higgins MD (Barrington, NJ)
- Lindsay Parks DO (Indiana, PA)

Many assembly Christians have had serious concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation is rapidly evolving, and public health authorities are not sure whether the outbreak can be contained by quarantine, or how long the pandemic will last. As of March 2, the World Health Organization has estimated the death rate worldwide at 3.4% (by comparison, the death rate from influenza in the U.S. is 0.1%).

The Christian has a resource that is unmatched - faith in the God, Who controls the universe. He and He alone is our Rock, our Refuge, our place of safety and security. His promises never fail. He knows all about this, and this has not taken Him by surprise. Prayer, trust in His Almighty hand, and intercession for those affected, should be our primary and constant priority.

Nahum 1:7 "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him."

In order to check the spread of the virus, government officials are imposing quarantines, which may affect some believers. The best defence against contracting the illness is to avoid contact with infected people, to wash your hands frequently and thoroughly (at least 20 seconds with soap), and to use sanitizing wipes on your hands and on surfaces that are frequently touched.

No vaccine or specific treatment is yet available, although some drugs for influenza (a similar virus) are being evaluated. Antibiotics are not effective, unless a secondary bacterial infection develops. It is important not to spread the illness—if you are sick, stay home. If you develop a deep cough or shortness of breath, seek medical help.

Many believers are asking what assemblies should do in public meetings to help curtail the spread of this infection. The following suggestions are made in good faith based on current evidence, and are not meant to be definitive. Most are common-sense precautions to avoid spreading the virus.

For member in general we recommend:

- Wash your own hands thoroughly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before leaving for the meeting and also after your return home.
(If this is has not been possible please use the soap provided in the washrooms.)
- We are seeking to provide antiseptic gel dispensers in the foyer for use however washing of hands for 20 seconds is deemed to be more effective.
- We are recommending no handshaking at present.
- It is thought wiser to put your contribution towards the Lord's work into the box going out of the meeting rather than coming in as you will be handling money.
- If you feel unwell, take a sore throat or symptoms of a cold, please stay at home and miss a week of meetings, just to be sure.

For elders/deacons we recommend:

- After every meeting, we will wipe down all frequently touched surfaces— door handles, hand rails, and hymn books etc. with disposable antiseptic wipes.
- Those who help move and set the chairs after a meeting should wash their hand thoroughly afterwards.
- Someone will wipe the handrails on the chairs with an antiseptic wipe after they are set.
- Those who count the money will wash their hand thoroughly afterwards.

The Scriptural practice of sharing the communal cup has raised concern. The alcohol in wine is not strong enough to be a disinfectant (alcohol must be 60% or 120 proof to kill viruses).

- A clean unused tissue will be provided to wipe the rim of the cup before and after partaking.

If the authorities advise against public meetings, we should comply as long as the recommendation remains in place. Otherwise, meetings can continue as usual, provided that we follow the above precautions.

As noted, the incubation period can be as long as three weeks. Thus a person can be infected (and thus spread the virus to others) for up to three weeks before he or she becomes ill. The wisest course for a person coming from an endemic area would be to self-quarantine for at least two full weeks.

While these recommended policies are not strictly necessary to carry out in areas with no nearby cases of COVID-19, it may still be wise to adopt them until the pandemic is over.

With this threat as any other, we must look to the Lord for wisdom and protection and trust Him.

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore will not we fear. – Psalm 46.