

Davis Square Family Practice Newsletter

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Providers

Deborah Bershel, MD

Michelle L. Clarke, NP

Carmen Phillips, NP

Andrea Dandridge, NP

Staff

Anne M. Roche
Practice Manager

Nicole Preusch
Medical Assistant

Daketa Bowens
Medical Assistant

Jennifer Runyan
Medical Assistant

Will Estes
Medical Receptionist

Valerie Aviles Mancia
Medical Receptionist

Issue: COVID-19 #3

March 29, 2020



FAMILY MEDICINE

Greetings!

COVID-19 Newsletter #3

March 29, 2020

Latest Updates As of The 29th of March

Administrative Matters

Office Hours have been slightly adjusted
Monday thru Friday 9AM until 5PM
Office phone is **617-666-9577**

Dr Bershel's cellphone (for **COVID-19 CONCERNS** of all types) is **617-230-7988**. **Please** only use when the office is **CLOSED**. Texting preferred if possible.

Office Visits

We are doing mostly **telemedicine visits**. But we will see acutely ill patients who do not have symptoms that could be attributable to COVID-19.

All staff are wearing masks and keeping 6 feet apart from one another. We are cleaning rooms with sanitizer after each visit. We are avoiding keeping patients waiting in the reception area but designated seating spots are at least 6 feet apart.

New Medical Information Since Covid-19 Issue #2

Symptoms of COVID-19

Fever, dry cough, sore throat, mild shortness of breath, fatigue, occasionally 'runny nose', muscle aches, diarrhea, headache, loss of sense of smell or taste.

You do not need to have many or all of the symptoms for you to suspect COVID-19 infection.

As most of us now know, you may be **TOTALLY** symptom free and still have the disease and be contagious.

The decision as to whether you need to be evaluated in the ER for possible admission is usually made based on how short of breath you are. When in doubt err on the side of calling us.

Valuable Links

[Basic General Information on Covid-19 from Up-To-Date Medical Journal](#)

[Health and Governmental Organization Recommendations form USA and Around the World](#)

Testing For COVID-19

As of Sunday March 29 - Mount Auburn will test all employees with symptoms. If you are not an employee and are a patient of ours, you can be tested if you have symptoms that suggest you may need admission. Also firefighters and EMS personnel who are symptomatic and work in Cambridge, Watertown, Belmont, Arlington, and Lexington. **Call us first and a clinician will prescreen you.**

Patients with weakened immune systems who have mild symptoms may qualify for testing too.

If you are able to quarantine and your symptoms are mild or improving, we ask you to remain quarantined for 14 days from the start of your symptoms and *NOT* get tested at this time.

AFC Healthcare is screening for Covid-19

Beware that they are franchised and have different owners and protocols for performing the testing depending on the location. The Bedford/Stoneham/Waltham offices have a different owner and protocols than the Arlington offices and the Malden offices.

They will not be testing everyone who calls. If you have mild symptoms you probably should let others with a more urgent need get tested. **Please call us first if you are unsure if you need to be tested as they are very busy.**

I personally spoke with the Arlington office on Sunday, March 29th, and they are trying to be appropriately judicious as to whom they feel should be tested.

Sensitivity rates may be far from perfect.

'Reassuring' Words

While **there will be notable exceptions**, the disease has a fairly predictable course. Of the people who get symptoms (perhaps 50% have no symptoms) about 20% will be ill enough to be evaluated for admission to the hospital. The vast majority of that 20% will eventually be discharged home - some, in a matter of a few days.

The mortality rate out of Italy is very sobering and, as you may know, are skewed by there being a very elderly average population. In addition, most who have died have had 2 or more risk factors for poor outcomes in addition to their advanced age.

If you should be ill enough to be admitted, your oxygen level will be carefully monitored. In addition, there are certain blood tests that give us a clue that you may need to be monitored even more closely for having an increased risk of needing the intensive care unit in the future. As soon as your need for oxygen lessens, then you are very likely to continue to steady improvement. It is unlikely, at that point, that you will have any 'surprises' like a secondary bacterial pneumonia (which can happen with influenza).

Currently we have enough hospital beds and ventilators in Boston. If we practice self-quarantining/social distancing, we may be able keep the numbers of symptomatic people and symptom-free COVID-19 carriers lower. That will translate into more available hospital beds and ventilators so we can give optimal care to the more severely ill patients - not just the COVID-19 patients.

If we act like we are working for the benefit of the entirety of the community and not just ourselves, we should get through this challenging time.

Risk Factors for Eventually Needing More Intensive Care

- Age, over 60
- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Chronic Lung Disease
- Cancer
- Chronic Kidney Disease
- Immuno-suppressive Medication

Do not alter or stop any medication during this time period without consulting us or your medical specialist!!!

Cigarettes and COVID-19

Smoking probably increases your chances of getting COVID-19 due to an increase in oral contact with the face and mouth should you have the virus on your hands. An analysis of patients in China indicates a very **strong correlation between cigarette smoking and the risk of more severe COVID-19 disease.**

My advice, if you can use this time of social distancing/quarantining to quit - great!! If you are feeling as though now is not the best time to quit, then consider at least cutting back. Strict social distancing/quarantining will lower everyone's chances of getting COVID-19.

Asthma

Many people have been asking about whether **asthma** is considered a risk factor for complications. As most asthma sufferers know, all sorts of stressors can temporarily worsen one's asthma. If you get COVID-19, that should be no exception. But **will you be at much higher risk of severe COVID-19 lung disease is a different question and is unclear. Suffice it to say, the underlying lung issues that are involved with severe COVID-19 disease are different than those involving a severe asthma attack.** If you are having significant shortness of breath - whether you have asthma or not - you should contact us to determine the next step.

Below is Useful Information from COVID-19 Newsletter #2

Incubation Period/Timelines

The time from contact until you come down with symptoms is from 2 days to 11.5 days. The average is 5 days. Most people who get worse and *MAY* eventually need hospitalization will start feeling worse around 1 week into the illness. If at anytime during the illness you start to feel better, that is a sign that you will continue to improve. Most people who have severe complications will not do so until almost day 8-10 of having had symptoms. **Currently we are told that 80% of people will recover with relatively mild symptoms.** Close to 20% will progress to having symptoms (typically extreme shortness of breath) that will warrant evaluation for admission. About 1/4 of that sicker group (5%) will require the intensive care unit and a ventilator. **There is usually a few day window where the shortness of breath gets worse before you need to go on a ventilator. So you should already be in the hospital before you need the intensive care unit.**

If you are feeling short of breath and cannot reach us, certainly call 911.

Treatment

Quarantine yourself if you think you have symptoms related to COVID-19. Isolate yourself from others in your home. Stay away from common spaces.

Despite that the World Health Organization said to the contrary, **avoid Ibuprofen, Naprosyn (and all NSAIDS)** except if you are on aspirin for protection from heart attack or stroke. This is the latest recommendation from the Mount Auburn Hospital infectious disease specialist. NSAIDS *MAY* increase the chance of complications if you get COVID-19. That same specialist says that suppression of fever is unnecessary and fever is viewed as the body's natural immune defense rather than something caused by the infection itself.

Statins (a class of medications used to lower cholesterol) May have some protective effect with COVID-19. If you do not need them for cholesterol lowering then we, of course, would not prescribe them. *BUT* if you have been recommended to be on them but declined them for personal reasons (not side effects), then call the office and we can discuss ordering them.

Hydroxychloroquine - May be helpful in the treatment of COVID19 but formal studies must be conducted to prove that is not only effective but **SAFE** in the face of this illness.

How Long To Quarantine?

14 days from the time symptoms first show up. If you spent more than 15 minutes with someone who has tested positive or has symptoms strongly suggestive of COVID-19 infection, quarantine for 14 days since last contact with that person. If you become symptomatic, then it resets to 14 days from the time of first symptoms. People who have more extreme symptoms, especially those who were hospitalized, may need more than a 14 day quarantine. Call us if you are unclear as to when to end the quarantine.

Social Distancing

Since there is no treatment for the virus, social distancing is the best overall 'cure' for this disease. Quarantine as much as possible given your individual circumstances. Go shopping if you absolutely need something indispensable. When you do go shopping that is the time to consider getting other items. The group of people that are largely treating this like a 'snow day' and hanging out in close quarters with strangers or friends are putting others at risk. This will lead to a much more widespread illness here and around the country.

Anxiety related to COVID-19

This was already an anxiety-ridden society. COVID-19 has added to that for many of us. So if you want to talk with any of us, we would love to offer support. It is one of the main reasons why we went into family medicine. **Even if it is after-hours we are here for you.** So give us a ring anytime!!

Deb (Bershel, MD)

And

Michelle Clarke, FNP

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