

2nd Update on Covid-19

23 March 2020

Bent Tree Family Physicians remains open and committed to being here for you on the front lines of this pandemic. Our team has been engaged since this crisis began, with most of us returning calls late into the night, and we plan to keep fighting until Covid-19 is defeated.

Please call us before you come to our office. And thanks for your patience. We will initially screen you by phone, because if you are likely to have Covid-19, we can't allow you inside to risk exposure to other patients. But we will care for you, guide you, and serve you in the safest possible manner. We are confident, and the data confirms, that most people will only have a mild illness. But our duty is to protect the weakest among us.

As many of you know, our initial advice was to "Stay Home". We studied Covid-19 before it arrived and we were ahead of most of the country with that good advice, so our message of "Stay Home" surprised a few people. Social isolation was then, and remains now, the best advice. Please Stay Home.

One of the most concerning discoveries about Covid-19 is how often it's carried by people with either no symptoms or very mild symptoms. That's good news for most of you. But it's very bad news for the people that you contact who may develop complications. The people we see in our office are often the very patients that can't tolerate this disease.

No one has ever had Covid-19 before, so no one is immune to it. Until a significant number of people have had it, recovered, and developed immunity, it will continue to spread extremely fast. The greatest disaster would be if too many people have complications in the same week and there is no way to provide care for all of them. Imagine choosing who gets the oxygen? Social isolation is helping. There are signs that effort may be decreasing the number of hospitalized patients, but it's still too early and the spread is too fast for us to relax. The peak of this disease is still 2 to 3 weeks away.

No other diseases chose to take a break during this pandemic. Diabetes, sinusitis, abdominal pain, and sore knees will still occur, and we want to help you. For your safety and convenience, we are serving most patients, whenever possible, by Telehealth. Small fees are necessary for BTFP to still be here when this crisis is over. We will file your telephone visit with your insurance, and your copays or deductibles still apply.

You may have seen some facilities in the news marketing themselves by having testing centers. But their testing is primarily for their physicians, nurses, and staff. Severely ill patients still need to go to the ER, and mildly ill patients are not yet advised to be tested. There have only been about 60,000 tests performed in the United States as of 3-19-20, mostly for the very sick, very rich, or very famous.

Bent Tree Family Physicians has ordered Covid-19 test kits, but we only received 20 last week, which we used quickly on high risk patients. More test kits are on the way. When we get more, we will come out to your car to test you if you're at risk. We hope to resume testing in the next week and ramp up the numbers quickly as we get more test kits.

There are test kit scams circulating the country. Fake testing is being sold to desperate physicians and worried patients. Even the most educated among us do not know enough about this. Price gouging is happening on products essential for saving lives. Our biggest problem has also been one of America's biggest problems. No one had the kind of safety equipment needed for this virus. No offices had anti-viral masks before this crisis, and just as Covid-19 appeared, so did the hoarders. We've had N95 masks on back-order for weeks but couldn't get them. No doctor or nurse should ever have to go face to face with this illness without a proper mask. Many of the first responders in China died, and 60% of them developed illness. The lack of available safety equipment for America's healthcare heroes is an embarrassment to every hospital administrator who has focused on buying the most profitable, money making equipment instead of protection for our front-line defenders.

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By now you've heard news of possible treatments. Chloroquine or Hydroxychloroquine are being studied and show some promise in small trials on a handful of people. These meds are not approved yet and are far from proven. But most relevant, they aren't even available. No pharmacies have any left, so don't bother asking us for a Rx. We can't get them either. And there may be better options on the way, with some anti-viral meds being studied. But I share everyone's wish that something can help. I'll keep you updated. Vaccines are at least a year away, maybe two. We can't make any present decisions based on future vaccines. But we are thankful for the scientists dedicated to finding those solutions.

While I am involved in this crisis at a national leadership level, I never stop thinking about the individuals. Every family is affected, from worried moms and hungry children, to business owners losing a lifetime of sacrifice. It is for the individuals that we fight. Each life makes difference and each person matters.

Finally, let me thank the brave nurses, lab techs, receptionists, and physicians of the world. This is not just an American problem. This is a human crisis. And in every country, there are healthcare providers and volunteers running into the storm to help another. Heroism is often a quiet act, and most are never seen, but each is proof of a goodness greater than our sum.

Guy L. Culpepper, M.D.

An Update on Covid-19

18 March 2020

During this critical time, Bent Tree Family Physicians intends to remain open to serve our patients.

To reduce risk, we are also adding TELEHEALTH services as needed. Simply call our office as usual at 972-377-8800. We are taking this day by day. Please read Dr. Culpepper's Covid-19 summary below. We will update you further as we gather more information.

A Family Physician's Update on Coronavirus

Stay Home! Do not go out to get a Covid-19 test if you are mildly ill. Curiosity is not a treatable symptom. Isolating this virus is our greatest hope to reduce deaths. If we do this properly, we will all look back in a few weeks and think Covid-19 was over-hyped. That will be wonderful. But if we see the continued escalation of spread, even a 2% complication rate will overwhelm our healthcare system. Imagine if 5,000,000 people broke their leg in the same week. Who fixes it?

Call your doctor if you are mildly ill, but do not go to your doctor's office. There's not a treatment. If you have a mild cough and fever, then stay in touch by phone with your nurse, family, and friends. But do not go see them. You'll get better in a few days. The only treatments for these symptoms are increased fluids, rest, and non-prescription meds if desired. Antibiotics don't help. Chicken soup, naps, water, and Netflix work better.

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If your shortness of breath worsens to the point of distress, then go to the ER. Otherwise, stay home. There's nothing else they can do for you.

Almost every patient gets better soon. Every time a mildly ill Covid-19 patient enters a doctor's office, it increases the danger that another person with greater risk will catch it from them and die. Your doctor and nurse are in danger too, and things do not go well without them. You do not want to kill people just because you were curious.

There is no medicine or treatment for Coronavirus. 95% of all who get it will have mild symptoms for about a week. Those symptoms are mostly fever, aches, and cough. Some people, especially children and young healthy people, have very mild or almost no symptoms. That's part of why it spreads so easily. Coronavirus spreads mostly by direct contact with hands to face. That's why hand-washing is key.

Surfaces such as handles, cell-phones, counters, can be cleaned with alcohol and Clorox wipes. That kills the virus quickly, otherwise it can survive hours on a surface. Coughing spreads it too, so keep a 3 foot distance from everyone possible.

The only treatments for the severely ill, those with severe trouble breathing, are to give oxygen and fluids. The people at greatest risk for becoming severely ill are those over 60, or those with diabetes, lung disease, immune disorders, or other debilitating conditions. Poor hygiene is a risk factor. The severely ill need the ER. Please save the ER for them.

The CDC and Health Departments do not perform the tests on patients, they process samples sent from physicians. Government labs have only performed around 14,000 tests nationally so far since the outbreak. These tests have been limited to only the severely ill patients that met key criteria, or to NBA players, politicians, and celebrities... yeah, nothing's fair. But again, testing doesn't really change anything right now. Many more testing kits are becoming available as I write this and more in the weeks ahead. But for now, please don't go seeking testing. Stay home. The Covid-19 test is not even a perfect test; it's not always accurate.

A false negative test might cause you to unknowingly keep sharing the disease. So please stay home. A few days rest will do you some good.

And it'll help the rest of us too.

Guy L Culpepper, M.D.