



For months, we have heard about the coronavirus and the respiratory complications that can occur when one is infected. We initially learned that symptoms include fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath. We now know that the CDC has reported additional symptoms of COVID-19 that include chills, muscle pain, **difficulty breathing (one of the most concerning symptoms)**, sore throat, and new loss of taste or smell. Hospitals treating COVID-19 patients have reported digestive symptoms including diarrhea, nausea, or vomiting.

We also know that symptoms of COVID-19 can range from mild to severe illness and appear 2-14 days after we are exposed to the virus (even from someone with NO symptoms at the time of our exposure!).

Many of these sound like symptoms we may suffer when we have the flu, and many folks are tempted to downplay the severity of COVID-19 infections when we compare it to the flu. We must remember, however, that COVID-19 is unlike the flu in a number of important ways:

1. It is easier to “catch” than the flu.
2. We have less experience treating serious cases of COVID-19 than the flu.
3. We have no vaccine for COVID-19.
4. It has a number of potentially serious complications that are very different than the flu, and is deadlier than the flu.

What are these other serious complications which require immediate medical attention?

Wheezing or chest pain: signals serious pulmonary (lung) effects

Bluish skin or lips: signals a lack of oxygen in the blood

Dizziness, confusion, impaired balance, or delirium: signals virus penetration into the nervous system

Blood clots or stroke: seen in patients in the ICU and may indicate damaged blood vessels; also seen in patients **under the age of 50**

Kidney injury: seen in hospitalized patients, particularly those on ventilators

“COVID toes”: Dermatologists are reporting patients (frequently younger, healthy individuals) with purple, swollen toes that resemble frostbite which may signal blood vessel inflammation and damage

Skin rashes: Dermatologists have seen red, itching, chicken pox like rashes on some patients that have positive virus tests

Multi-system disease: Although young children rarely develop symptoms from COVID-19, a few will develop lengthy fevers, low blood pressure and inflammation of the heart and arteries

The outbreak of COVID-19 presents challenging medical issues to many, and also may produce overwhelming fear and anxiety in adults and children. The CDC reminds us that stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include the following:

Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones

Changes in sleep and eating patterns

Difficulty sleeping or concentrating

Worsening of chronic health problems (particularly when we skip or postpone routine health check-ups)

Worsening of mental health problems

Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

Of great concern to mental health experts is the prediction that deaths from suicide, drugs, or alcohol abuse because of the COVID-19 pandemic could equal or exceed deaths from the infection itself. Observing for symptoms or signs that may lead to these issues in loved ones and seeking help promptly is critical during these difficult times. Adolescents may show symptoms of depression differently than adults, so we should be on the lookout for withdrawal, anger, or other behavioral changes (such as changes in eating habits, sleeping or acting out) in your children during this stressful time.

COVID-19 will continue to be an infectious challenge for some time, and fortunately as we learn more, we realize that many patients have asymptomatic or mild cases. Continuing growth of our knowledge about this disease will help us find ways to treat and prevent. However, we must maintain our vigilance (the 3 W's) to reduce our chance of developing an infection, be compulsive in continuing our routine and emergency medical visits for non-COVID health issues, and continue to care for our families and loved ones as we monitor their, and our, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being.

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/assistance/mental-health-substance-abuse/crisis-services>



The COVID-19 Community Task Force (CCTF) is a volunteer organization established to engage the community in responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic and to support and augment the County's efforts. The information shared by the CCTF is not an official communication from Pamlico County, its Health Department or the Pamlico County COVID19 Task Force.