

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Things You Need To Know About The Coronavirus”

As China put millions of people on lockdown amid an outbreak that has killed 300+ people in the country and infected around 8,000 globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) said it was "a bit too early" to declare a new coronavirus a global health emergency. Health officials fear the transmission rate could accelerate as hundreds of millions of Chinese travel at home and abroad during week-long holidays for the Lunar New Year. In China, this is indeed an emergency situation and has resulted in a lockdown of 11 million people. The previously unknown virus strain is believed to have emerged late last year from illegally traded wildlife at an animal market in Wuhan. The name coronavirus refers to spikes seen (under a microscope) on the surface of the virus (corona is the Latin word for crown). Non-fatal cases have also been detected in Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the United States. There is no vaccine for the virus, which can spread through respiratory transmission. It's moving quickly around the world. Relatively little is known about the 2019 novel coronavirus at this point, and there is no standard diagnosis, medication, or other treatments beyond making sure a patient gets enough hydration and oxygen. The bottom line is that there is a new flu-like bug, now known as the 2019 novel coronavirus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) still considers the risk from the virus to the American public to be low. The 2019 novel coronavirus appears to be one that has the ability jump from animals to humans, but the method of transmission is unclear and it can be transmitted from person to person. Similar to other infectious diseases, older adults and people who have underlying health conditions are considered to be at increased risk for more severe symptoms. The symptoms that have been identified so far include fever, cough and difficulty breathing that can be severe enough to cause people to seek hospital care. As with a cold, there is no vaccine for the coronavirus—and a flu vaccine won't protect people from developing it. Experts say, "The best thing you can do at this point is take care of yourself the way you would to prevent yourself from getting the flu. You know you can get the flu when people sneeze and cough on you, or when you touch a doorknob. Washing hands—especially after eating, going to the bathroom, and touching your face—and avoiding other people who have flu-like symptoms are the best strategies at this point."

In the America that I love, heed the warnings. Extreme caution is warranted because of how little is known about this deadly new novel coronavirus.

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