

From an RN on the Frontline: Sound Advice

By Sarah Wright, RN, Woodland Lakes Preserve

So what I have seen a lot of is recommendations for how to try to avoid getting coronavirus in the first place -- good handwashing -- but what I have NOT seen a lot of is advice for what happens if you actually get it, which many of us will.

So as your friendly neighborhood RN, let me make some suggestions.

You basically just want to prepare as though you know you're going to get a nasty respiratory bug, like bronchitis or pneumonia.

You just have the foresight to know it's coming.

Things you should actually buy ahead of time (not sure what the obsession with toilet paper is?): Kleenex, Acetaminophen (Tylenol) in 325 mg tablets, Ibuprofen (Advil) in 200 mg tablets, Mucinex, Robitussin or whatever your generic cough medicine of choice is (check the label and make sure you're not doubling up on acetaminophen - some brands like DayQuil have it included and you don't want that). You want a cough medicine with both a cough suppressant and expectorant.

Vicks vapor rub for your chest is also a great suggestion. (Also I should think this would go without saying, but editing to add that of COURSE if you have a medical contraindication to any of these over the counter meds, you should not take them.

If you are on blood thinners, for example, no Advil for you — if you are on blood pressure meds, you need to be careful about which cough medicine you take.

Check with your doc or pharmacist if you're even the slightest bit unsure and these aren't meds you routinely take for a cough/cold)

If you don't have a humidifier, that would be a good thing to buy and run in your room when you go to bed overnight. (You can also just turn the shower on hot and sit in the bathroom breathing in the steam).

If you have a history of asthma and you have a prescription inhaler, make sure the one you have isn't expired and refill it/get a new one if it is.

This is also a good time to meal prep: make a big batch of your favorite soup to freeze and have on hand.

Whatever your favorite clear fluids are to drink (Sprite, juice, ICE waters, Fresca, whatever floats your boat), stock your pantry with those. Maybe get some nice soothing tea too!

For symptom management, use the meds I mentioned. For a fever over 101, alternate Tylenol 650 mg and Advil 400 mg so you're taking a dose of one then the other every 3 hours (ie Tylenol at 9 am, Advil at noon, Tylenol at 3 Pm etc)

Drink A TON, hydrate hydrate hydrate. Rest lots. You should not be leaving your house except to go to the doctor, and if you do, wear a mask (regular is fine, you don't need an N95).

You DO NOT NEED TO GO TO THE ER unless you are having trouble breathing or your fever is very high and unmanaged with meds. 90% of healthy adult cases thus far have been managed at home with basic rest/hydration/over-the-counter meds.

We don't want to clog the ERs unless you're actually in distress. The hospital beds will be used for people who actively need oxygen/breathing treatments/IV fluids.

If you have a pre-existing lung condition (COPD, emphysema, lung cancer) or are on immunosuppressants, now is a great time to talk to your PCP or specialist about what they would like you to do if you get sick. They might have plans to get you admitted and bypass the ER entirely.

One major relief to parents is that kids do VERY well with coronavirus— they usually bounce back in a few days, NO ONE under 18 has died, and almost no kids have required hospitalization (unless they have a lung disease like CF). Be sure to use kids formulations of OTC meds and dose appropriately for their age/weight, and ask the pediatrician if you have any questions about medication safety for your child's age.