FAQ's About Coronavirus, COVID-19, and the New Vaccines
General Information

What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that can cause respiratory illness in humans. They get their name, "*corona*," from the many crown-like spikes on the surface of the virus. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and the common cold are examples of coronaviruses that cause illness in humans. The newly identified coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, has caused a worldwide pandemic of respiratory illness, called COVID-19. This coronavirus was first described in Wuhan, China in December 2019.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a very infectious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

COVID-19 symptoms include cough, fever, chills, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, loss of smell and/or taste, muscle/body aches, sore throat, diarrhea, headache, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, nasal congestion, or a runny nose.

What is the incubation period for COVID-19?

It appears that symptoms show up in people within 10-14 days of exposure to the virus, very commonly within 5-6 days after exposure.

Is this coronavirus different from the coronavirus that causes SARS?

SARS stands for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. In 2003, an outbreak of SARS started in China and spread to other countries before ending in 2004. The virus that causes COVID-19 is similar to the one that caused the 2003 SARS outbreak: both are types of coronaviruses. Much is still unknown, but COVID-19 spreads much faster than the 2003 SARS.

How does the SARS-CoV-2 spread from person to person?

The coronavirus is spread:

- When the virus travels in respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, sings or breathes near someone within six feet. This is thought to be the main way COVID-19 is transmitted from person to person.
- When the virus travels in small respiratory droplets that linger in the air for minutes to hours from an infected person who is more than six feet away or has since left the space. This method of spread is more likely to occur in enclosed spaces with poor ventilation.
- From close contact, such as touching or shaking hands with an infected person.
- By touching surfaces that the virus has dropped upon, then touching your eyes, mouth, or nose before washing your hands. It is not thought to spread easily by this method.

The virus enters the body through the mouth, nose or eyes (directly from the airborne droplets or from transfer of the virus from your hands to your face). The virus travels to the back of the nasal passages and mucous membrane in the back of the throat. It attaches to cells there, begins to multiply and moves into lung tissue causing a respiratory disease.

How long is a person infected with COVID-19 considered contagious?

At the present time, the answer is unknown. What is known is that people infected with COVID-19 can spread the virus to others before experiencing symptoms themselves (while people are still "asymptomatic"). Once a person has symptoms, the CDC says that a person is no longer contagious 10 days after symptoms were first noted.

How soon after becoming infected with COVID-19 will a person develop symptoms?

This "incubation period" is the time between becoming infected and showing symptoms; it can range from two to 14 days. The average time before experiencing symptoms is five to six days. Symptoms range in severity from very mild to severe. In about 70-80% of all patients, COVID-19 causes only mild symptoms.

Who is most at risk for getting COVID-19?

Persons at greatest risk of contracting COVID-19 are:

- People who live in or have recently traveled to any area with ongoing active spread.
- People who have had close contact with a person who has a laboratory-confirmed or a suspected case of the COVID-19 virus. Close contact is defined as being within six feet of an infected person for a *cumulative* total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period, with or without wearing a mask.
- People over age 65 who have pre-existing medical conditions or a weakened immune system.

If a person has a positive test for SARS-CoV-2, how long should self-isolation last?

According to the current CDC recommendations, a person should self-isolate until that person has met all three of the following criteria:

- It has been 10 days since the symptoms first appeared.
- The person has not had a fever for 24 hours and has not used fever-lowering medications (such as aspirin, Tylenol, ibuprofen, etc.) during this time.
- All COVID-19 symptoms have improved.

How long is it necessary to isolate oneself if one has been around a person who has tested positive for COVID-19?

According to the CDC, if one has been in close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, the safest strategy is to stay home for 14 days after last being with that person.

In November 2020, the CDC updated its guidance. Alternatives to the 14-day quarantine are:

- End quarantine after 10 days without a test for PCR-COVID-19 if no symptoms are present at any time over these 10 days.
- End quarantine after seven (7) days if there have been no symptoms at any time over these seven days and have tested negative for COVID-19 by a PCR-COVID-19 test. The PCR-COVID-19 test should be obtained no earlier than day 5 of quarantine. If one has a negative test result back before day 7, stay isolated for the full seven days. If results are not back by day 7, continue quarantine up to day 10.

What are the emergency signs and symptoms that suggest that one should obtain emergency care immediately?
If anyone is showing any of these symptoms or signs, seek emergency medical care *immediately*:
- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Bluish lips or face

Is it possible to test negative for COVID-19 and still be infected with the virus?

Yes, it is possible. This is known as a "false negative" test result, meaning that a person really has COVID-19 although the test result indicates that the person does not. One of the main reasons for a false negative COVID-19 test result is that testing was performed too early in the course of illness: the virus hasn't multiplied in the body to the level that it could be detected by the test.

What are the vaccines against COVID-19?
As of January 2021, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has granted Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for two coronavirus vaccines: one created by Pfizer and BioNTech and a second created by Moderna. The Pfizer vaccine is administered as two doses, 21 days apart and was authorized for use in those age 16 and older. The Moderna vaccine is administered as two doses, 28 days apart and was authorized for use in those age 18 and older. Both vaccines have shown similar efficacy levels of near 95%.

There are several other vaccines under development at the time of this writing (February 2021).

What are the reported complications after COVID-19 vaccination?

As COVID-19 vaccines become more widespread, some rare side effects of the vaccination will almost certainly emerge. The Food & Drug Administration has described some common side effects. These have included pain where the vaccination was given, fatigue, headache, chills, fever, and joint and muscle pain, but these are all described as transient lasting up to 24 hours post-vaccination. These side effects are more commonly seen after the second vaccination.

Is it necessary to still have to wear a mask after the COVID-19 vaccination?

Yes, because one can still transmit the coronavirus to others after vaccination.

Is it possible to test positive for COVID-19 after the vaccination?

It is possible to test positive for the coronavirus even after getting vaccinated. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two doses to be fully effective. The CDC has said that it can take weeks for a person's body to build up immunity after getting vaccinated. That means it is possible a person could be infected with the coronavirus just before or just after vaccination and get sick. This is because the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection.

Can I get COVID-19 as a result of the vaccination for it?

The COVID-19 vaccines available today do *not* cause COVID-19.

Will the COVID-19 vaccination produce a positive PCR COVID-19 test?

The vaccination will *not* produce a positive PCR COVID-19 test result.

Is quarantine ever necessary after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine?

Vaccinated individuals can still have asymptomatic shedding of the virus after exposure. Therefore, the CDC states that such individuals still need to quarantine after an exposure.

Which lasts longer, immunity after getting COVID-19 or protection from the COVID-19 vaccines?

The protection one gains from having an infection (called "natural immunity") varies depending on the severity of the disease, and it varies from person to person. Because SARS-CoV-2 is new to us, we do not know how long natural immunity might last. Current evidence suggests that getting the virus again (reinfection) is uncommon in the 90 days after the first infection with the virus.

Can I take the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as another vaccine?

No, it is advisable to wait at least 14 days before getting any other vaccine, including a flu or shingles vaccine, if you get your COVID-19 vaccine first. And if you get another vaccine first, wait at least 14 days before getting your COVID-19 vaccine.

What about the new mutants of SARS-CoV-2?
As of February 2021, there are several known SARS-CoV-2 mutations, as was expected. These variant strains have been predicted to potentially be more rapidly transmissible than other circulating strains of SARS-CoV-2.

These new strains of the virus, from the United Kingdom (B.1.1.7 strain), Brazil (P.1 strain), and South Africa (B.1.351 strain), appear to be more transmissible, but at least so far, not more deadly…not at the individual level. The effect of these more contagious strains on populations as a whole, however, is more serious. Even though the main worry for individuals is that it's easier to catch these new strains, it follows that the more people who catch them, the greater the chance that someone in that new pool of people will develop an infection that turns deadly, perhaps due to co-morbidities. Which is why, at the population level, these new COVID strains are extremely concerning.

Researchers are working to learn more about these variants to better understand how easily it might be transmitted and whether currently

authorized vaccines will protect people against it. There is encouraging data to suggest that the current Pfizer and Moderna vaccines may be effective against some of these mutants.

Can the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines be given to a pregnant woman?

Yes, the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna cannot transmit COVID-19. These vaccines have no live virus. These vaccines do not contain ingredients that are known to be harmful to pregnant women or to the fetus. Many vaccines are routinely given in pregnancy and are safe, such as tetanus, diphtheria, and influenza.

Can a woman get the vaccine if she is nursing?

There are no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in lactating women or on the effects of mRNA vaccines on the breastfed infant or on milk production/excretion

What if a person had COVID-19 should that person still get the vaccine?

Yes, it is recommended that a COVID-19 vaccine should be given 90 days after a person has had COVID-19.

How long does immunity last?

At this time, the answer is unknown. It may turn out that an annual COVID-19 vaccine may be required, similar to the annual flu vaccine. Stay tuned!

What about giving the vaccine to individuals under 16 years of age?

Pfizer's vaccine has been authorized for ages 16 and up. Moderna's vaccine is currently authorized for ages 18 and up. Both companies have begun clinical trials for younger individuals. Young adults and children are not typically at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Consequently, even adolescents who are old enough to receive Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine will likely be in the final group to receive it.

There are a few exceptions: Individuals ages 16 and up with high-risk health conditions may have the opportunity to get the vaccine

sooner, as well as individuals age 16 and up who are essential workers.

What does one need to do when returning to the USA after international travel?

This is a rapidly changing situation. Please refer to the CDC Guidelines for up-to-date requirements:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/testing-international-air-travelers.html

What does one need to do when traveling domestically in the USA?

This also is a rapidly changing situation. Please refer to the CDC Guidelines for up-to-date requirements:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html

Also refer to the New York State Travel Advisory:

https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-travel-advisory

You can also call the New York State Hotline at 1-888-364-3065 for further information.

Where can I visit without the need to quarantine?
You may visit any place in New York State, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. However, visiting those places may still require quarantine and/or testing should you visit a venue that was ill-advised by the CDC, such as a large non-family gathering or illegal gatherings.

May I use self-quarantine time as sick time?
You may only use quarantine as sick time if the need to quarantine was not voluntary such as experiencing symptoms, testing positive, or other non-voluntary situations. However, if you decide to leave the state for any reason not associated with work such as a family gathering or vacation, that time must be taken as vacation time. If you attend a venue that was deemed illegal by the local government, you may need to quarantine using vacation time. Violating laws or policies may also lead to reprimand up to and including termination.

If I violate a CDC or State rule, will there be anything the College or Clinic can do to me?
Yes, violating any rules, laws, or guidelines mandated by the government may lead to reprimand including possible termination.

If local or federal rules change, will NYCPM/FCNY abide by them?
Absolutely! Should the restrictions ease, NYCPM/FCNY will follow suit.

If I want to work remotely, may I?
No, there are several criteria that must be met in order to work from home. First, the job must be able to be performed at an adequate and acceptable level. You also must have a health condition that prevents you from working on campus. This health condition and the need to work remotely must be documented by a healthcare provider.

If my healthcare provider states that I can't work on campus, isn't that enough?
No, if your position allows you to maintain social distancing and/or meets or exceeds CDC guidelines, the healthcare provider would need to supply medical evidence that states why your working condition prevents working on-campus.

My healthcare provider states that the work environment is OK, but he/she recommends I stay away from mass transit, will that allow me to work remotely?
No, the approval to work remotely must be considered against the work environment, not your commutation issues.

I am healthy, but I fear getting COVID-19 or transmitting it to my family. May I work remotely?
No, the fear of contracting COVID-19 is not an acceptable excuse.

I have family care issues where I need to stay home to take care of my children. What do I do?
You must speak with Human Resources. There are certain conditions and programs that may help you.

Will NYCPM/FCNY make COVID vaccinations mandatory?
There are no plans to make these vaccinations mandatory at this time.

What is the personal protective equipment (PPE) policy at NYCPM/FCNY?

- Clinic staff members and students are required to wear masks which cover the nose and mouth at all times. Surgical masks and N95 masks are provided by FCNY for this purpose.
- Clinic staff members in close contact with patients will be provided N95 masks. Also required are face shields and/or goggles.
- Students and clinical faculty are required to wear N95 masks and face shields or goggles in the clinic. Clinical rotations supply PPE for students.
- Patients are required to wear face coverings when entering the building and while being treated. The only exceptions are children under the age of two years of age.
- Disabled adults from group homes who are unable to wear masks are required to submit recent negative COVID-19 test results prior to their appointment. Mobile plexiglass barriers are used while the treatment is rendered.

What is the required screening to enter the NYCPM/FCNY building?

- Clinic and college employees as well as podiatric students are all required to complete the online *COVID-19 Questionnaire* from Information Systems sent daily to everyone's NYCPM e-mail address at 3:00 AM. After submitting the questionnaire, if you have indicated that you do not have symptoms of COVID-19, or exposure to anyone with COVID-19, or have had no recent travel out of the tri-state area, you will receive a *green check* on your mobile device. This green check is required to enter the building. *Failure to answer correctly on this questionnaire may result in disciplinary action.*

- Vendors, contractors, security personnel, and patients must complete the paper questionnaire and be approved by security and clinic staff before entering the building
- Temperatures are taken on all individuals entering the building at all entrances.
- Any individual who does not have a green check on his/her mobile device or has an elevated temperature will **_not_** be granted admission into the building. They are asked to seek medical attention from their primary care physician and to report back to the Medical Director, Mark H. Swartz, MD.

Why aren't the cafeteria and gym open?
The rules for reopening food services and gyms are stricter than for other businesses and schools.

What is the current policy regarding lectures, recitations, workshops and labs?

Until it is determined that it is safe to return to a live and in person format, all lectures, recitations and Q/A sessions will be delivered virtually. In instances where proper social distancing in conjunction with appropriate PPE can be utilized, small group recitations, workshops and lab sessions may occur with attendance requirements as per the course director.

What is the current policy regarding didactic examinations?
Until it is determined that it is safe to return to on campus testing, all didactic examinations will be administered remotely using a proctored format. Evidence of any exam taking impropriety will be reviewed and appropriate sanctions instituted if necessary

What is the current policy of attending clinical rotations?
All third- and fourth-year students are required to attend and participate in all scheduled rotations, clerkships and externships unless required to quarantine.

What is the school policy regarding absences in the clinical years due to COVID-19?

CLINIC SESSIONS:
- All clinic sessions missed related to COVID-19 quarantine will have to be made up on a 1:1 basis as per the Chair's discretion.

EXAMS:
- If the reason for the student's absence is illness, then he/she has the right to a makeup exam.

- Any student who is required to quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure or travel will still be required to take any scheduled tests and complete all assignments during his/her absence.

The above school policy applies to NYCPM/FCNY and all clerkships and externships *regardless of location*.

Should you have any specific COVID-related questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mark H. Swartz, MD, Vice-President for Professional & Medical Affairs of NYCPM and Medical Director of FCNY. Please use only your NYCPM e-mail to contact him at mswartz@nycpm.edu.