

What Is a Pandemic, and What Can We Expect?

The volume of information regarding COVID-19 released in the past week is overwhelming. The initial, simple message has increased in complexity with new tallies daily on how many are infected and what actions governments, educational institutions, hospitals, and businesses are taking to help control the spread of the infection.

With no medications or vaccines currently available, the focus remains on personal hygiene, COVID-19 testing and public health strategies.

But really ... what is a “pandemic,” and what can we expect over the upcoming weeks as the world responds to this infection?

A pandemic is defined when an infection has “efficient and sustained human to human transmission worldwide.” Some recent prior pandemics have included HIV/AIDS 2005, Hong Kong Flu pandemic 1968 and the Asian flu pandemic of 1956.

There are phases to a pandemic with different public health strategies applied in each phase:

Currently, in the United States, we are experiencing the acceleration phase, so you can expect a rapid doubling of cases over the next days to weeks. How fast this occurs depends on how successful we are in applying public health strategies.

Over the next week, we will continue to see case identifications with the isolation of those sick patients, enhanced testing for COVID-19 to help us to identify cases, plus the addition of more and more social distancing, which includes things like canceling large public events, closing schools and so forth.

The peak of the pandemic will see cancellation and postponement of elective medical care, including procedures like knee replacements, hysterectomies and routine physicals.

Much has been highlighted in the news regarding COVID-19 testing and social distancing, but one important thing to note is that COVID-19 testing is *recommended for only a small subset of people* who:

- Have a fever of 100.4° and cough/shortness of breath.

And:

- You have returned from international travel with the last 14 days, or

- You have returned from a cruise within the last 14 days, or

- You have been in close contact with someone who is sick with known coronavirus.

As more tests become available, testing volume will increase. Still, it is important to understand that these tests are primarily to help our public health and medical systems to understand the timing and aggressiveness of social distancing, and to manage medical resources.

For the short term, there are no proven antivirals or vaccines to treat this infection. Medical care will be focused on supportive treatment for those who develop breathing complications from the virus.

As a reminder, if you are concerned that you may have symptoms of fever, cough or shortness of breath and are wondering if you should seek testing, please consult with your health provider. Medi-Share members should take advantage of the free MDLive telehealth resource, which allows you to speak with a board-certified physician 24/7 who can help guide you on the best next steps to safeguard your health.

Medi-Share, like our nation, will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation. We encourage our members and everyone to stay calm and to follow local public-health recommendations regarding travel, avoiding work/school if sick and implementing social distancing when directed in your area.

We are grateful to be a part of a faith community and are lifting our members, our staff and our nation in prayer. Take comfort from the words of the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:6–7, NLT: “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” {eoa}

About Medi-Share: *Florida-based Christian Care Ministry operates the Medi-Share health care sharing program through which members voluntarily and directly share each other’s medical bills. Since the program’s inception in 1993, Medi-Share members have shared nearly \$2.4 billion in medical bills. And because of access to an extensive network of more than 900,000 doctors and facilities, members have saved an additional \$1.6 billion in medical costs during that time. Medi-Share has over 400,000 members in all 50 states.*

More than just health care, Medi-Share is a community of people who share their lives, faith, talents and resources and pray for and encourage one another. For more information, visit

About Dr. Alesia Greene: *Dr. Alesia Greene is a board-certified family physician with leadership experience in clinical operations, clinical quality process improvements, patient safety program management, and patient-centered medical home strategies. She also had a successful military career in the Air Force serving as a staff family physician, medical director, primary course instructor, chief of the medical staff, and ultimately Commander, Chief of Aerospace*

*Medicine. Dr. Greene joined the Medi-Share team in 2018. Visit
, or go to Twitter @ccm_medishare, or Instagram medi_share.*