

Getting on with your life in the age of coronavirus

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(HealthDay)—As coronavirus continues to spread across America,

people in some areas are quarantined. Conferences, sporting events and travel plans are being called off, while hand sanitizer and toilet paper is flying off the shelves.

Short of finding a well-stocked bunker, how can you learn to live with this new normal?

An important key to living with the looming threat of this virus is flexibility, experts say.

"You have to be willing to change as the situation changes, and it's likely to keep changing for a while. This is a good time to think about what you would do if your child's school closed? If you had to keep working, who could you count on?" said Robin Gurwitch, a psychologist at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C.

Living with uncertainty

Gurwitch said uncertainty leads to high anxiety and panic. She said that's likely one of the reasons why people have been stockpiling things like [hand sanitizer](#) and toilet paper.

During any viral outbreak, "one of the things that helps to reduce anxiety and worry is when we have a very clear and unified messaging from respected officials. Viruses aren't political, they're a public health issue," Gurwitch explained.

"What is creating more distress now is that there are really different messages out there. When that happens, people start filling in the gaps in the messaging themselves, and they may think they're not being told everything. That's when you get panic buying," she said.

"Coronavirus has taken quite a bit of our sense of control. But buying

supplies is something I can control. I can know that I have enough supplies. And it makes me feel like, 'I've got this,'" Gurwitch said.

Here are some additional steps you can take to bring back a little bit of normalcy to your life.

At home

Plenty of folks were caught short and don't have a supply of hand sanitizer, but soap and water are fine. "At home, you don't need alcohol-based sanitizer. Soap and water are also very effective," said Chunhuei Chi, director of the Center for Global Health at Oregon State University.

Chi said when you get home, wash your hands well, and clean your cellphone with alcohol, or put soap and a little water on a paper towel, clean your phone and immediately dry it.

Don't forget to clean surfaces that everyone touches often—doorknobs, toilet handles, faucets and remote controls.

Out and about

Life does go on, and you'll need to go to work, school and shopping. When you leave your home, Chi suggested carrying tissues with you. Whenever you need to open a door, grab a shopping cart or even push an elevator button, use a tissue to create a barrier between you and the object. If you have hand sanitizer—containing at least 60% alcohol—he said you can use it to disinfect your hands.

"This virus is very sensitive to alcohol," Chi said.

Many stores also keep sanitizing wipes by their carts for you to clean the

handle before you shop.

Dr. Debra Spicehandler, co-chief of infectious diseases at Northern Westchester Hospital in Mount Kisco, N.Y, said it's important to pay attention to potentially common sources of infection.

"After touching pens, money, [credit cards](#), or even salt and pepper shakers, try to use hand sanitizer right away. If you can't, don't touch your hands to your face," she said.

And, Spicehandler said, skip handshakes altogether.

Travel

Travel is becoming more of a challenge. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is advising that people defer cruise ship travel for now. That's especially true for anyone with an underlying chronic illness that might put them at greater risk from the coronavirus, such as heart or lung disease or diabetes. While you might not get your money back, your cruise line may give you credit for a future cruise.

The CDC is advising people not to fly to countries where coronavirus is widespread, such as China, Iran, Italy and South Korea. Check the CDC website before traveling internationally. The CDC said air travel itself isn't likely to be a problem.

Dr. Krystina Woods, director of infection prevention at Mount Sinai West in New York City, explained, "Planes do have filtered air. Proximity [to someone who is ill] is the thing that might be concerning, and you don't have much control over who is sitting beside you on a plane. But you do have control over whether you wash your hands or touch your face."

If you decide to cancel a flight, policies on whether or not you can get a credit or refund vary, so check with your airline.

Large events

At least for the foreseeable future, it's going to be important to check whether or not an event is still taking place. A number of large conferences and events have been delayed or canceled out of an abundance of caution. The big California music festival Coachella has been rescheduled to the fall. New York stalled its big auto show until August, and the South by Southwest Festival in Austin, Texas, was canceled.

"Indoor gatherings, especially any with 1,000 or more people, should be avoided," Chi said.

Learning to live with the risk

"There's been a lot of concern, bordering on panic recently. But most people who get the virus have relatively minor illness and the majority are getting better," Woods said.

Gurwitch advised staying up-to-date on the situation by checking reliable sources of information, such as the CDC. And take the steps you can to control your personal and family situation.

If you do get symptoms—fever, cough, difficulty breathing—call your doctor or local emergency room to find out what to do, Spicehandler advised. The CDC also recommends calling your doctor if you find out you've been exposed to someone who develops COVID-19, the illness caused by [coronavirus](#).

More information: For answers to coronavirus questions, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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