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CORONAVIRUS: DEBUNKING COMMON MYTHS

GAINESVILLE, Ga. – There have been an overwhelming number of reports on social media, the news and television about Coronavirus (COVID-19). Here are some of the currently known details and most common misconceptions regarding the new disease.

MYTH #1

Wearing a face mask will protect me from getting the COVID-19 infection.

FACT: It is important for everyone to remember that the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) does not recommend face masks for the general public who are well as a protection from COVID-19 or other respiratory diseases. Certain models of professional, tight-fitting respirators – such as N95 respirators – can protect healthcare workers while caring for patients with certain infections. Healthcare workers are fit tested for these masks annually and are trained to use them properly.

Additionally, if people stockpile masks at their homes out of concern, they could inadvertently prevent healthcare facilities from getting the supplies they need for ill patients and the staff treating those patients. Instead, good hand hygiene – washing hands for at least 20 seconds – is very important and cough etiquette – covering your mouth while you cough or sneeze and then washing hands or using sanitizer – is highly recommended.

MYTH #2

The flu vaccine can protect me from COVID-19.

FACT: There is no vaccine currently available to protect us against COVID-19 illness. The flu vaccine is highly recommended to prevent influenza, which is currently much more common in the U.S. than COVID-19. It is very important for us to be prepared for any new public health event, but that should not distract us from focusing on what is common currently in the U.S., like flu.

MYTH #3

Antibiotics are effective against COVID-19.

FACT: COVID-19 is a viral illness. Antibiotics are effective against bacterial infections. As of now, there is no proven evidence to support the use of antibiotics for COVID-19. Unnecessary antibiotic use can lead to the development of resistant bacteria and other complications.

MYTH #4

COVID-19 can be transmitted through packages or letters.

FACT: According to the World Health Organization (WHO), currently there is no evidence that mail can transmit COVID-19. WHO reports that this virus does not survive long on objects such as letters or packages.

MYTH #5

Every person who gets COVID-19 dies.

FACT: Based on the reports to date, the global mortality rate is between 2 and 2.5 percent. Risk of hospitalization or mortality is higher in elderly patients and those with other chronic medical conditions. More than 80 percent of COVID-19 patients have mild, flu-like symptoms.

MYTH #6

COVID-19 is currently more common than flu in the U.S.

FACT: The CDC estimates this season we have had 32 – 45 million flu cases as of the end of February. While COVID-19 has been identified in multiple countries including the U.S., based on the current reports as of March 2, it is less prevalent than flu.

MYTH #7

Spraying alcohol or chlorine all over the body can kill COVID-19.

FACT: Spraying alcohol, chlorine or bleach all over the body will not kill any viruses that have already entered the body or protect from those who could have the virus. These chemicals are used for disinfection of objects or surfaces. When they come in direct contact with eyes, skin or mouth, they can be harmful.

We will learn more about COVID-19 in the coming weeks and months. Always try to get updated information regarding COVID-19 from reliable sources like local public health authorities, CDC and WHO.

In the meantime, it is important to stay home if you're sick, consult a healthcare practitioner if you have flu-like symptoms and return to work only after your symptoms have improved and fever has resolved. We can each do our part to prevent the spread of illness by practicing good hand hygiene, cough etiquette and disinfecting surfaces. And, we should all remember to show compassion and empathy to each other.

For more information about Northeast Georgia Health System, visit nghs.com, and for the most current information about COVID-19, visit cdc.gov or who.int.

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Dr. Supriya Mannepalli is medical director of Northeast Georgia Physicians Group Infectious Disease and Chair of the Northeast Georgia Medical Center Infection Prevention and Control Committee. She is board-certified and specializes in treating infections from different bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi. Dr. Mannepalli works closely with the NGHS Infection Prevention and control team and encourages antibiotic stewardship.

ABOUT NORTHEAST GEORGIA HEALTH SYSTEM

Northeast Georgia Health System (NGHS) is a non-profit on a mission of improving the health of our community in all we do. Our team cares for more than 1 million people across the region through four hospitals and a variety of outpatient locations. Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) has campuses in Gainesville, Braselton, Winder and Dahlonega – with a total of more than 700 beds and more than 1,100 medical staff members representing more than 50 specialties. Learn more at www.nghs.com.