COVID-19

Why are people so worried?

With the news about the COVID-19 outbreak changing every day, there are those who wonder if people are overreacting. Do we really need to stay home, wash our hands all the time, and keep our distance from other people? Why is everyone so worried?

There are two main reasons.

1

Some people will have serious illness or even die.

It's true that most people who get infected won't get too sick. For many, the symptoms are similar to a bad cold or the flu. They may feel uncomfortable for a week or two, but they can recover at home.

But some people do get very ill. Those who are most at risk of serious illness include older adults and people who have a serious health problem, such as heart disease, diabetes, or asthma. So far, about 80 out of 100 people who have died have been older than 65. That means that 20 out of 100 who have died have been younger than that.

One thing we've learned about COVID-19 is that it is very contagious. It spreads easily from person to person. If you get it, you could pass it to someone who's dear to you—a friend or family member. Even if they're not in a high-risk group, their life could be in danger.

2

Our healthcare system may not be able to handle a large outbreak.

This disease can cause serious trouble breathing. Some people who get infected will need to be treated in the hospital. Many of them will need intensive care and special equipment such as ventilators.

If too many people get sick at the same time, we may not have enough hospital beds, equipment, or doctors to treat them all. We have seen this in other countries, like Italy. The strain on their healthcare system means that doctors are having to make decisions about who gets treatment and who doesn't. We don't want the same thing to happen here.

That's why we all need to take steps now to slow the spread of the virus in the United States. It could help protect those we love. It could help keep our hospitals from being overwhelmed. And it could save lives.

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