

After months of news reports, facebook posts and retweets, information about COVID-19 seems to be everywhere you look. With the prevalence of social media, it can be especially difficult to know what pieces of information are accurate and important, or false and spreading misinformation.

While there are dozens of misconceptions and old theories that are being revised with the new information scientists and doctors are finding, these 14 misconceptions about COVID-19 are common and important to dispel.

1. COVID-19 only affects the elderly and those with underlying health issues, so they are the only ones who will die.

Adults of all ages are testing positive for COVID-19. It's important to note that those over the age of 60, pregnant women, those with a compromised immune system, like cancer patients and some chronic illnesses, are at a high risk of contracting COVID-19. Those demographics aside, anyone can contract the virus, however it may likely be a less serious case. In fact, around 80% of people infected have mild symptoms and just over 1% have been asymptomatic.

2. This new coronavirus is a lab-made virus

It's true that this strain of coronavirus, technically called SARS-CoV-2, is new, or "novel" among the scientific community. But it was not lab made. It developed through natural changes and mutations in microorganisms. Because of dense human populations, huge varieties of animals and the close contact they have with humans, medical experts actually had been expecting an epidemic of a new virus sometime soon.

3. All hand sanitizers will kill the virus

While using hand sanitizer isn't a bad idea to use, it doesn't seem to be very helpful against COVID-19 unless it has an alcohol content of at least 70%. And it isn't a replacement for hand washing. Being thorough and washing your hands regularly, especially after handling anything outside your home, is the best way to keep sanitary.

4. Gargling with or squirting brine or saline solution up the nose prevents transmission

There is no evidence to suggest this is true at all. In fact, if the saline solution you use is too high in its salt content, it could cause damage to the upper respiratory tract.

5. Heat will kill the virus

There have been several heat-related claims regarding COVID-19. Some have said the virus won't be able to survive the warmer summer months. Others have suggested that hot beverages, such as tea or coffee, could kill the virus. Neither claim has been proven. And if a beverage is too hot, it could burn and damage the protective layer of skin on the roof of the mouth and in the throat.

And while some government officials may have suggested that high temperatures will kill the virus, there is currently no evidence to confirm that theory. Some environmental factors contribute to viral infections becoming less prevalent in the summer months, but there are also social factors to consider, such as people spending more time outside.

Additionally, previous research with the SARS and MERS epidemics, cousins to COVID-19, show that this family of viruses may have no problem surviving warm climates.

6. You can protect yourself against COVID-19 by taking Vitamin C and eating more garlic and onions

Garlic and onions are healthy additions to any diet, and while they may help protect you against vampires and aid in your social distancing efforts, they haven't shown any special ability to protect against the coronavirus. And while Vitamin C is good, it also won't help to protect you against the virus and isn't a cure for the virus.

7. A COVID-19 vaccine has already been developed but hasn't been released

There is no vaccine yet for COVID-19. The World Health Organization (WHO) has announced the first round of vaccine trials and some pharmaceutical companies and labs are also trying to develop options. While a successful vaccine would be a hugely important first step, there will still be several rounds of safety testing and verifications before wide-spread production and use of a vaccine. Dr. Anthony Fauci, an expert on infectious diseases, estimated the vaccine won't be available for commercial use for at least a year.

8. Antibiotics are necessary for treating COVID-19

Because COVID-19 is a viral infection, antibiotics do not work at all. Antibiotics are used to treat bacterial infections.

9. COVID-19 is comparable to seasonal influenza

As government officials first started responding to the coronavirus, many drew a comparison between COVID-19 and the seasonal flu, an attempt to downplay the severity of the disease and the panic related to the news. Weeks later, we now know that the coronavirus is more lethal than we previously understood and could cause hundreds of thousands of deaths. This comparison between the seasonal flu and COVID-19 is difficult to pin down without context. Recent data suggests that COVID-19 is slightly more transmissible - meaning able to pass from person to person - than the seasonal flu. As far as fatality rates, data suggests that the seasonal flu has a fatality rate of about 1% while COVID-19 has a fatality rate of 2%. While these may seem like small distinctions, this epidemic has shown us how little attention is paid to the seasonal flu and just how much 1% means on a global scale.

10. "Social distancing" is only necessary for high-risk populations

We are seeing that there is a statistical probability that younger demographics are less likely to die from the coronavirus. So why do the people less likely to die from the virus have to shut themselves away? Because of the transmission. Everyone could be a source of infection and while a younger person may not die from it, it could easily be passed to someone who will. As some states and cities begin to reopen businesses and ease restrictions, social distancing will still play an important part in keeping the spread of COVID-19 to a minimum.

11. The problem will go away once a vaccine is ready

As we mentioned earlier, the confirmation of a vaccine that works will not mean the end of COVID-19. Because there will need to be several rounds of testing to confirm that a vaccine is safe and effective, a vaccine ready for wide-spread usage will likely not be available for 12 to 18 months, according to Dr. Anthony Fauci, a leading expert on infectious diseases.

12. People don't need to be tested unless they are sick or showing symptoms

Testing is important for everyone and many are calling for universal testing. It would help people to protect themselves and those around them, as the incubation period - the time between a person contracting the virus and the time they show symptoms - seems to vary widely. Also, about 1% of cases are asymptomatic, or show no symptoms. Speedy, expedited testing would also help those who may have the virus to isolate themselves sooner rather than later. While testing is obviously important for those showing symptoms, it would still be beneficial for those who aren't, especially if they are high risk or have possibly been exposed to someone with the virus.

13. You can get COVID-19 from products recently shipped from China

So far, there has been no evidence that animals or animal products from China could spread COVID-19. There may be some possibility that a person could contract the virus from coming in contact with particles on a surface, but they would then have to touch their eyes, nose or mouth to contract the virus. There's also no suggestion that surfaces are the main way the virus spreads. Some data shows it can live on surfaces for as much as nine days, emphasizing the importance of hand washing, but this method of transmission is not nearly as likely to get a person sick as close contact is.

14. Animals can contract and spread COVID-19

To dispel this myth, we have to understand that "coronavirus" actually refers to a family of viruses. SARS-CoV-2 is the technical name of the virus causing the disease we are calling COVID-19, or more commonly "the coronavirus." There was a dog in Hong Kong that tested positive with coronavirus, however WHO stated after that dogs can not spread the virus causing humans illness. Dogs may be susceptible to the family of coronavirus, but they are not able to get infected with or spread THIS strain, SARS-CoV-2, causing so many issues.

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