Billings Clinic – COVID-19 FAQ

1. **What is Billings Clinic doing to ensure patient safety?**
   Billings Clinic takes patient and staff safety seriously. We have detailed and thorough plans for patient care and protecting staff. Billings Clinic staff at all locations have been trained and are prepared to care for patients with serious infections like COVID-19.

2. **What should Billings Clinic tell patients about travel?**
   Billings Clinic recommends travelers follow U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations – cancel all nonessential travel. Those with underlying health conditions should avoid nonessential travel to affected areas and areas with community spread.

3. **Where should patients call or show up if they suspect exposure to or have COVID-19?**
   If you have new symptoms associated with COVID-19 including a new cough, shortness of breath or a fever AND you have recently:

   - Returned from international travel within the past 14 days **OR**
   - Returned from an area in the U.S. with COVID-19 community-spread transmission **OR**
   - Been in close contact with any confirmed COVID-19 person

   Please call the Billings Clinic Healthline at **(406) 255-8400** or **800-252-1246** for additional instructions.

4. **Should I be concerned if Billings Clinic is treating COVID-19 patients and/or should I cancel my appointment at Billings Clinic?**
   No. We treat patients with a suspected infectious disease with an abundance of caution. Also, as of March 17, 2020 Billings Clinic is rescheduling all non-urgent appointments and procedures.

5. **What exactly is COVID-19?**
   COVID-19 is an acronym for Coronavirus Disease. 19 is added to identify the year the virus was discovered which was in 2019. The virus that causes COVID-19 is SARS CoV2. SARSCoV2 is a newly identified respiratory virus within the coronavirus family. This is a new (novel) virus that causes COVID-19 and is a serious illness. Diagnosis is difficult because it shares several symptoms with influenza and other respiratory viral illnesses.

6. **How is COVID-19 transmitted?**
   COVID-19 is thought to spread similarly to influenza. That is, it spreads person to person through respiratory droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze. These droplets can land on surfaces within about 6 feet and can spread to other people after they contact these infected surfaces with their hands and subsequently touch their face.

7. **Can I catch COVID-19 from contact with an object rather than a person?**
   Yes, you can catch COVID-19 from an object if the surface of that object has live virus on it. How long the virus can live outside an organism is unknown. Expert estimates range from a few hours

to up to nine days, depending on the type of surface, surrounding temperature and environment.

8. **Can a person have COVID-19 without having symptoms?**
    Yes.

9. **Is there a vaccine for COVID-19?**
    There is currently no vaccine for COVID-19. The [National Institutes of Health](#) is developing a vaccine, but it will not be ready and approved for use for at least a year or more.

10. **What should I do if I have symptoms of COVID-19?**
    If you have symptoms of COVID-19, call the Healthline that at **(406) 255-8400** or **800-252-1246** that has been set to guide you through the next steps. If you feel you need to be seen by a health care provider, please call the Healthline before coming to the hospital and they will direct you. If you are a Billings Clinic employee, please call Employee Health during business hours 7:00 AM – 9:00 PM M-F and 7:00AM– 3:00PM on Saturday and Sunday.

11. **Is Billings Clinic prepared to handle these COVID-19 cases?**
    Yes, Billings Clinic is prepared to treat patients with COVID-19. Billings Clinic also is prepared to do so at a pandemic level, if needed. That said, know that Billings Clinic will treat patients as part of a community wide plan in coordination with the Unified Health Command, which includes Riverstone Health, St. Vincent Healthcare and Yellowstone County Disaster and Emergency Services.

12. **How is a patient treated for COVID-19?**
    The basic premise of preventing disease transmission is to identify patients who show symptoms, isolate those patients from others for appropriate assessment, and inform appropriate staff and authorities for further response. If people appear with symptoms, they will be asked to wear a surgical mask and answer a series of questions about their health and travel. Based on their answers and vital signs, they will be isolated from other patients while COVID-19 test results can be verified. This may take several days.

    Patients who test positive for COVID-19 are isolated and treated. Currently, there is no antiviral treatment for COVID-19. Specific interventions are taken in more severe cases, or with patients with compromised immune systems or complex illnesses.

13. **What can I do to avoid COVID-19?**
    To avoid COVID-19, you should:
    - Keep your hands clean. Wash them frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds or disinfect them with an alcohol-based hand rub frequently.
    - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
    - Practice social distancing. This means to avoid going out to large gatherings and keeping at least 6 feet away from others when you are away from home.
    - Stay home when you are sick.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your cough and sneezes with the inside of your elbow to keep germs from spreading to others.
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces routinely.

14. **Should I wear a face mask?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. You should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it. A facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms. This is to protect others from the risk of getting infected. The use of facemasks also is crucial for health care workers and other people who are taking care of someone confirmed to have COVID-19 in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).

15. **How will I know if there are cases of COVID-19 in my community?**

State and local health departments and the CDC are responsible for publicly reporting confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Billings Clinic is committed to the privacy of its patients and complies with all applicable laws, including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, or HIPAA. As always, Billings Clinic does not share patient-specific information with the media without prior authorization. Also, Billings Clinic collaborates with public health authorities, including the CDC and local and state public health authorities, as appropriate. These authorities are best-positioned to provide public health information.

About this FAQ:

Many of these answers reference statements and standards already communicated by the CDC, the definitive source for prevention and procedure for infectious diseases in the U.S.