FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COVID-19: Just the Facts...
By Dr. Michele Dikkers, Chair of Clayton County Board of Health

COVID-19 is a new disease in our world. It seems like it has been around forever, but in the scientific world, it is very early in the game.

We are learning so much every day and will keep learning about it. So, what do we know? There is so much information coming at us from so many angles. Let me see if we can make a few things clearer.

“It’s just a cold” Colds are caused by over 200 different viruses, most are from a rhinovirus, the cause of up to 80% of colds. The other 20% caused by other viruses, such as adenoviruses, influenza viruses, respiratory syncytial viruses and coronaviruses. You won’t need to be hospitalized for the common cold, it will resolve on its own in 3-7 days, rarely keeping people home from work.

“It’s just the flu” The flu is caused by the influenza virus that causes a specific respiratory infection, typically lasting 5-7 days, there are vaccine and treatment options. Symptoms start 2 days after exposure, making it easy to isolate and stop the spread.

COVID-19 is caused by a new variant of coronavirus. You may have been exposed 2 weeks prior to symptoms. There is no vaccine to prevent it. There is no specific treatment readily available. Patients that become seriously ill with COVID-19 and need to be on a ventilator may need to be in the ICU on a ventilator for over 28 days, sometimes up to 45 days. Pneumonia and influenza patients that need a ventilator, spend much less time in the ICU if they are critically ill, 3-7 days.

“If I don’t have symptoms, I can’t spread it” Eighty percent of COVID-19 cases may be asymptomatic. Epidemiologists (people that study how disease is spread) have determined that even when you don’t have symptoms, the disease can be spread to others. Patients can be contagious 2-3 days prior to having symptoms.

“I can’t get it, I’m young” In Iowa 85% of the cases are less than the age of 60 years old, 55% are under the age of 40 years. In Clayton County 74% are under the age of 60 years, and 50% under the age of 40 years.

“I’m not over the age of 65, I’m not at high risk” High risk patients are not just the elderly. Certain medical conditions also place them at high risk. The most high-risk illnesses include heart disease, diabetes, obesity, chronic kidney disease, COPD and high blood pressure.

“Are there really more cases or just more testing?” When we see an increase in cases there are 2 important numbers to look at, number of hospitalized patients and the positivity rate. If there is an increase in the number of hospitalized patients, that would correlate with actual increase in cases. If the positivity rate/percentage is above 5%, this also indicates increase in cases. If the positivity rate is less than 5%, the cases and outbreak are considered well controlled.
“If my test is negative, I don’t have to worry” If you have had contact with someone that tests positive for COVID-19, it is important to get tested. Testing may not take place for at least 48 hours to help improve the chance of an accurate test. It may take up to 14 days for your test to be positive. Therefore, the CDC recommends that those exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19 should isolate themselves at home until Day 14.

“Wearing a mask won’t protect me/Only those that are sick need to wear a mask” COVID-19 is carried by respiratory droplets. If you wear a mask, it is difficult for those droplets to travel very far. If you wear a mask over your nose and mouth, it is difficult for the respiratory droplets carrying COVID-19 to enter your nose, mouth or respiratory tract. So, imagine how difficult it is for those droplets to get through two masks.

When faced with questions, turn to medical sources…The CDC, IDPH, Mayo Clinic, John Hopkins.

Be Well.

We are in this together.