

Take Care, Healthcare Interpreters, During Coronavirus time

This is a message of support and encouragement for our wonderful interpreters across the country.

There is some information below that you can use to keep you safe from getting sick and prevent you from transmitting germs between any of the people that you contact each day.

First, if you have not already taken the fundamental training Infection Control and Industrial Safety for Medical Interpreters, this is helpful to learn many critical skills.

Access this fully narrated one-hour training FREE at this link:

<https://store.masterword.com/product/infection-control-safety-medical-interpreters/>

You can earn CEUs if you are certified as a health interpreter. Many courts may also accept this as continuing education.

Going beyond the fundamentals, let's talk about the corona virus.

The corona virus is primarily transmitted by droplets that an infected person coughs or sneezes out into the space around him. Droplets land on clothing, hair, personal items, furniture, pet fur, exposed skin, and surfaces wherever the person passes. Infected people also shed some virus in their stool and urine, so bathroom surfaces have been found to have virus.

A person can be infected with corona virus and can transmit virus even if his symptoms are so mild that no one notices that he is infected.

So we need to re-enforce our attention to the rules of Universal Precautions: Consider every person around you to be a possible source of infection. Consider all surfaces that you come in contact with to possibly be contaminated.

As an interpreter, adjust your approach to people and manage your exposure:

- Do not shake hands, simply greet people.
- Sit with some distance between chairs if possible.
- Do not touch the counter at the reception desk. Do not touch the waiting room tables or chairs with your hands. Do not touch anything in the exam room or patient care space. Move chairs with your foot.
- Do not put your personal belongings (phone, purse, appointment book, glasses) down anywhere. Carry the minimum stuff in a small bag with a shoulder strap. The small bag should fit under a hospital gown if you need to put one on.
- Keep your coat on, or minimize its contact with the environment if you have to take it off.
- Carry a packet of tissues so that you can blow your nose or touch your face through a tissue.
- Wear clothing that you can put in the washer every day when you get home. As an interpreter you are exposed to a huge number of other people and to lots of germs of all kinds. This includes your coat or jacket. Do not wear anything that needs to be dry-cleaned for now.
- Wipe down your phone and pen and small bag as you come home.
- Wash your hands with lots of soap and water at home. If you have family members coming and going, have them all wash hands when they come in and when they go out. Make sure they know how to get clean around the nails and all parts of the hands. Wash the hand towels regularly.

At work in a clinic or hospital use the provided alcohol gel, which has a high enough alcohol content to be effective as well as moisturizers to protect your skin.

- Gel as you move from space to space. As you enter the building and move toward your destination, notice whether you have to touch doors or elevator buttons.
 - Gel when you get to your destination.
 - Gel as you leave the exam room or treatment room. If you have to touch anyone or anything before you leave the building, such as waiting in the pharmacy or lab with your patient, gel again before you leave the building. In other words, gel in and gel out of each space, not just with each patient.
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- Don't wear a face mask unless your care team is wearing them. Follow instructions of the care team to put on protective garments and equipment. If anyone on the care team is wearing protective gear, check with them about whether you should also be wearing it. Some protocols refer just to staff doing direct hands-on care to the patient, such as changing a dressing, whereas in other situations everyone in the room needs to be in protective gear.
 - The front of a mask and the front of the cap and eye guard and gown are all considered contaminated. Take items off by holding at the inside edge toward the back of the item. Gel before putting gloves on and after taking gloves off.
 - Come to work dressed to put on gowns and jumpsuits over your clothing. Keep your hair controlled, nails short for the same reason, to maximize infection control and facilitate putting on and taking off gloves and other protective gear. (Wash your hair often during this outbreak.)
 - Do not eat or drink anything in health care buildings. Just don't. The cafeteria is full of sick people. Bring your lunch and eat it outside or in your car or eat in a nearby café. Don't carry coffee or water with you. Even if you keep coffee or water in your bag, your hands are all over the place all day and that will get onto your drinks container at some point. (After flu season and corona season, you can carry drinks with you but still don't drink in waiting or care areas.)
 - For your home, buy a recognized bleach disinfectant like Lysol. Spray your shoes regularly as you come home or when you get in your car after appointments. This is good practice for any health care worker.
 - Don't give back assignments or refuse assignments just because you are afraid to go out. Use your knowledge about infection control to stay safe. Patients need all health care workers to show up.
 - Remind the care team that if they are wearing masks, and if you are wearing a mask, it is much harder for the patient to understand them and you. Go more slowly and check for understanding.

Last but not least, don't treat the patients as if they are dangerous or undesirable. We are all in this together, and we need to be gracious and kind and humorous about this difficult situation.

So proud of you for doing your important work!

Linda Golley, author of Infection Control and Industrial Safety for Medical Interpreters.