

My Experience With COVID-19

by Kyle Pennington

Part 1: Suspicions of Illness and Testing

I have unfortunately contracted COVID-19 with symptoms, and the experience has been both unpleasant and strangely enlightening. Pastor Eric asked me to provide the congregation with an insight into the process, and I am happy to help.

My wife Chelsea, my daughter Evie, and I went to visit my parents, Greg and Letitia Pennington, in Northwest Arkansas during the week of June 13-20. I had not visited my parents since Christmas, and several factors made that week seem like the perfect opportunity.

My parents had been extremely careful in their efforts to avoid contracting COVID-19. They mostly stayed home, they wore masks in public places, and they washed their hands immediately after touching anything or anyone outside of their own home. My dad has an “essential” job and was thus required to go to work, but they otherwise tried to socially distance as much as possible. It was therefore shocking to us all that my father, Greg, tested positive for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) on Saturday, June 20. My mother tested positive a day later.

We believe that my dad must have contracted the illness from an asymptomatic carrier at his workplace, where he could not consistently wear a mask for various work-related reasons. I am certain that I contracted it from him when he and I went on a fishing trip before he began showing symptoms. Outdoor transmission is unlikely, so I believe I became infected while riding in the same vehicle with him on the way to the lake. That is the only “confined space” that we shared in which we were less than six feet apart.

My mom called me with the news of my dad’s positive test while we were driving back to Texas from Arkansas. Upon arrival in Waco, we immediately began self-quarantining, leaving our house only to go to the clinic to get our coronavirus tests.

In Waco, a person only qualifies for an immediate, walk-in coronavirus test if you have been in contact with someone who tested positive or are showing symptoms yourself. Otherwise, the clinic requires online registration with a significant wait time. Since Chelsea and I had been in contact with a positive case and were beginning to show symptoms, the clinic agreed to test us immediately. The greatest blessing in this entire ordeal is that our two-year-old daughter Evie is at extremely low risk of

contracting or suffering symptoms from COVID-19. The risk is so low that the clinic won't even test her unless she begins showing obvious symptoms. Evie is still perfectly healthy, which is an incredible relief to her mother and me.

I will admit, the standard coronavirus test administered in Central Texas is an unpleasant necessity. It consists of the nurse inserting a cotton swab nearly three inches into both nostrils. The sensation caused by this procedure is very uncomfortable and slightly painful, but it is necessary for an accurate test. The attending doctor told me that I very likely had COVID-19, but that it would take up to a week to receive my results due to the recent spike in cases in Texas.

Part II: Symptoms and Treatment

One of the strangest qualities of COVID-19 is the bewildering variety of symptoms that can accompany the illness. These symptoms are in no way consistent across the infected population, which makes diagnosis very difficult without a laboratory test. Also, the severity of symptoms can vary wildly depending on age, general health, and a host of other factors. My parents have had somewhat different experiences from me, but this is my experience as a healthy, 29-year-old man:

For everyone in my family, the first symptom to appear was a consistent, low intensity headache. This headache lasted for over 24 hours. I took Tylenol, but the headache returned as soon as it wore off. Fortunately, the headache lessened with each passing day. That said, my parents' headaches have been consistent for several days now.

Another near universal symptom, and the most severe one in my case, is a full-body fatigue and soreness. It is similar to that experienced during influenza, but most COVID-19 patients (including myself) consider this fatigue to be worse than the flu version. For me, the soreness was most severe on the second and third days after my symptoms began. The fatigue began to lessen beginning on the fourth day. However, my 58-year-old dad, who has other health issues, is still experiencing severe fatigue that has yet to subside after a week of symptoms.

Most people suffering from COVID-19 develop a low-grade fever. This fever is consistent, but it rarely exceeds 101 degrees. The fever isn't a major problem, but the sweats and chills that accompany it can be frustrating. Both my dad and I have had a great deal of difficulty regulating our body temperatures. We alternated between sweating and severe chills for at least three days. My dad continues to struggle with this, but I began improving on the fourth day.

The strangest symptom experienced by everyone in my family, as well as a majority of coronavirus patients, is a loss (or in my father's case, an excess) of the senses of taste and smell. This odd symptom is almost exclusively connected with COVID-19, so doctors are using it to determine the likelihood of infection in cases where laboratory tests are unavailable or long delayed. Interestingly, it is also noticed by many otherwise asymptomatic cases. This loss of senses is not harmful and should subside within a few weeks, but it is a classic giveaway that someone has COVID-19. If you notice a severe reduction of taste or smell, you should immediately get a coronavirus test.

The most concerning symptom that can appear is difficulty breathing. COVID-19 cases are no longer considered "mild" when this symptom appears. Luckily, other than a tightness in my chest, I have not suffered from any respiratory effects. My father has had a severe cough, but neither he nor my mother are experiencing labored breathing. Anyone who has difficulty breathing should go to the hospital immediately because their infection is progressing to the rare and potentially deadly version.

The final symptom I have experienced is hypersensitivity to physical contact. I experience a prickling sensation whenever any part of my back or sides touches another object. It doesn't really hurt, but it makes laying down or receiving a hug uncomfortable.

This is the entirety of my journey with COVID-19 so far. I believe that I am on the mend after five days of symptoms, but my parents are still suffering. Most of us who are healthy should not live in mortal fear of this disease. However, it is no joke. I completely understand how this virus could have fatal effects on the previously ill or very elderly. We must do what we can to ensure that we do not infect the most vulnerable among us.