



Jackson County Department of Public Health

154 Medical Park Loop • Sylva, NC 28779

Tel: 828-586-8994 • FAX: 828-586-3493

Shelley Carraway
DIRECTOR

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To: Jackson County Community & Stakeholders

From: Jackson County Department of Public Health

Re: Your COVID-19 Questions Answered by Dr. Ben Guiney & Dr. Brad McAbee

To help calm fears and address misinformation, the Jackson County Department of Public Health (JCDPH) has partnered with Harris Regional Hospital to get some of your medical questions answered. Recently, we sat down with Emergency Physician and Town of Sylva Board Member, Dr. Benjamin Guiney, and Emergency Physician, Dr. Brad McAbee, to get some of your most pressing questions answered.

I am experiencing signs and symptoms of respiratory illness or I've been diagnosed with COVID-19. My healthcare provider tells me to manage my symptoms from home. How do I do that?

Dr. Guiney: Most important is self-care. Get lots of sleep and eat healthy. The other symptoms of the common cold (nasal congestion, etc.) can be handled with over the counter cough/cold meds like Benadryl, Tylenol, etc. I recommend avoiding products with alcohol in them like NyQuil.

My healthcare provider tells me to call them back if my condition worsens. What does worsen mean? What should I be watching for?

Dr. Guiney: The symptoms that we as health care providers are most concerned about are difficulty breathing and rapid respiration rate. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness and when oxygen levels are low that is when we intervene. As always other symptoms like chest pain or inability to keep fluids down should also be addressed by your doctor, urgent care or the ER. If you feel your condition has taken a dramatic turn for the worse seek out care.

I've heard that I should be monitoring my oxygen levels and pulse if I am sick. What's the best way to do this? What should I be looking for?

Dr. Guiney: There are products called Pulse Oximeters that are available at most pharmacies (although there may be a shortage at this time) that allows you to check your levels at home. Normal is 99-100% for most healthy people, but anything above 92% is OK. If you are below 90% you should seek medical attention.

While monitoring my oxygen levels and pulse, I notice that my oxygen levels are decreasing and/or my pulse is increasing. I know I should call my healthcare provider. What will they likely tell me to do then? What is the intervening treatment at this point?



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Dr. Guiney: You should be evaluated by a medical provider immediately. Urgent Care or ER are most appropriate and if unable to get to either then call 911/EMS for evaluation at home.

Once sick, are there things I can do to prevent the virus from getting into my lungs? Is there anything I can do to prevent the need to go on a ventilator?

Dr. Guiney: Avoiding the virus and keeping yourself healthy are that best treatments at this point, but once infected resting and good self-care are the best. The virus is already in your lungs once infected the severity of the course of the infection varies from person to person. Those with underlying health conditions (especially lung issues) and the elderly are most at risk. Quit smoking/vaping today and take your regular medicines prescribed by your doctor to keep your diabetes, hypertension, etc. under control.

Do I need to take any medication or supplements once diagnosed? I've heard rumors about hydroxychloroquine.

Dr. Guiney: The only medicines other than over the counter you should take are the ones prescribed by your doctor. Hydroxychloroquine has not been proven to have much effect on the virus and is certainly not going to be "a game changer." There are serious potential side effects with this drug (sudden death) that does not justify its possible marginal benefits. Unfortunately, there just is no medication treatment at this time.

What's your best advice to your patients and the community at this time?

Dr. McAbee: My best advice is to take care of yourself and one another. What we have been doing on a population level has clearly worked to flatten the curve and hopefully one day we can get back to a more normal lifestyle. I also want to urge people to not neglect their health out of fear of exposure. If you are sick and need to seek medical attention than you should do so. It's our job within the health care system to keep you safe when you come to us seeking care. And we are here wanting to take care of you beyond just virus treatment. We all still have other healthcare needs and those shouldn't be neglected out of fear of something else.

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