Coronavirus / COVID-19 FAQs:

At NCH we’re focused on our patient-first philosophy and the safety of our employees. As always, our mission is for everyone to live a happier, healthier life. To that end, there’s a lot we are learning about the Coronavirus, yet there’s still a lot to uncover. Below are frequently asked questions regarding COVID-19 that will help you understand the state of the virus.

Social distancing: Are we doing enough? Have we started to flatten the curve?
As far as “flattening the curve” goes, it is still too early to tell if our current efforts are enough to stave off a surge of the sick…and social distancing can help, somewhat, towards that cause.

But the best social distancing practice is to stay at home…and not enough are doing that. Staying at home is the only guaranteed way of protecting yourself and your loved ones from catching this virus. Until we can get all community members who are not needed in our government, healthcare, and other essential service offices to remain in place – at home - the answer is no…we are not doing enough.

Is the U.S. testing enough?
Because of the limited availability of supplies – test kits included – we are testing appropriately, given the fact that there is not enough tests to go around. We are reserving test kits for populations most-at-risk and for the sickest individuals who exhibit symptoms associated with COVID-19.

Could there be asymptomatic people in the community unknowingly spreading the virus?
Yes. And those individuals are not marked to let others know they are “carriers.” That is why it is crucial to maintain social distancing and avoid groups in general...stay at home.

What range of symptoms have you seen in patients? We are seeing classic fever and flu-like symptoms, dry cough, and difficulty breathing.

If you get COVID-19 do you become immune or can you catch it again? It is too soon to say…we are still learning about this virus.

What are some important things people in Southwest Florida need to know? Keep yourself healthy and follow the CDC and DOH recommendations. Follow the guidance of your healthcare providers and government officials.

What have you learned during this pandemic? We are all still learning, but most notably however, is that we have learned just how generous and compassionate this community is. Our neighbors and community have offered us a tremendous outpouring of support in the way of their “thank yous” and prayers, as well as their gifts of needed supplies and food for staff. They truly have been a blessing for all.

How is NCH staff coping?
Our staff is doing an amazing job in caring for our patients and “keeping it together.” We are doing what we can to ease the stress on our workers with such things as making daycare available to essential clinical staff and offering stress relief support resources for those employees who feel those things could be of personal benefit to them. We cannot thank our staff enough.
Aside from washing our hands and covering our cough, what are some other important things to do to protect against the virus?
Perhaps the most important thing any one of us can do is to listen to and follow the advice of our local and state leaders as well as our healthcare providers. These folks are on the front lines in battling this epidemic and have valuable information our community can use to help us all...so please – and we cannot iterate this enough - follow the self-isolation rules, social distancing practices, and state and local ordinances surrounding business, park, and beach closures. By doing so, you will help us all in overcoming this pandemic much more quickly.

What steps can I take to prevent illness?
According to the CDC, there is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. Here are two ways to protect yourself: 1) Clean your hands often; 2) Avoid close contact with others. There are also ways to protect others: 1) Stay home if you’re sick; 2) Cover coughs and sneezes; 3) Wear a facemask if you are sick; 4) Clean and disinfect touched surfaces daily.

What do I do if I feel sick?
Keep in mind that current statistics indicate that well over half the population who get sick, have mild to no symptoms and can get well at home in self-isolation with no emergency care needed at all. However, if your condition starts to deteriorate, the CDC asks you to call your doctor. If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and symptoms, such as cough or difficulty breathing, call your healthcare provider for medical advice.

What does a ‘Public Health Emergency’ entail?
The public and hospitals should be accessing and following the CDC recommendations for management of the COVID-19 virus.

How many people have contracted the Coronavirus?
Numbers are changing daily. The most up-to-date resources are the World Health Organization, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Johns Hopkins University.

When did coronavirus preparations begin for NCH?
Preparing for a communicable disease outbreak such as COVID-19 is a practice that hospitals devote considerable time and resources to. Specifically, for COVID-19, NCH has been closely monitoring the virus since it first appeared in the media and also through patient care studies published in the medical journal Lancet and JAMA in February. The World Health Organization determined that COVID-19 was a Global Health Emergency on January 30th, 2020. This news made it clear that NCH may have to activate the pandemic plan that has been established.

What is the plan for infected patients regarding isolation at both NCH North and Downtown?
Regardless of location, The NCH plan in place today is to have any patient who is ill and believes they may be at risk for the COVID-19 to contact their healthcare provider who can consult with the Florida Department of Health to refer patients to the most appropriate place for their care. However, all patient care facilities and offices are prepared to identify and manage the initial care of a suspected case of COVID-19.

How many different hospital teams are involved?
All teams at NCH are involved. This includes our Hospital Administrators, Security, Reception and Registration staff, Nursing, and Emergency Room staff. Also involved are our providers including our Emergency Room, Critical Care, Infectious Disease providers and hospitalists. We also have transporters, environmental service workers, laboratory, and infection preventionists actively engaged in planning for this type of an event.
What are the mechanics of a testing kit?  
This is a swab of a patient’s throat, essentially with a Q-tip.

How long could NCH respond to a coronavirus presence?  
Taking care of our neighbors and our NCH family is our mission and priority.  NCH will be able to deliver ongoing healthcare services to our community as a result of our connections with our community partners, the Florida Hospital Association as well as state and federal resources.

How long does it take for Florida patients to get results after being tested for COVID-19?  
After being tested for COVID-19, it can take up to 5 days to be informed of a presumptive positive or negative result. All presumptive positive or negative results will then be sent to the CDC lab for final validation of results at the state lab. We will follow CDC guidelines regarding caring for any suspected COVID-19 case, if symptomatic as a potential positive case. This means that prior to any lab results we will follow CDC, PPE guidelines and care algorithms to assure the safety of our patients, staff and community.

Does NCH have enough protective gear to prevent exposure and spread to staff/patients?  
NCH has carried out the CDC instructions to educate hospital staff and visitors on the appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE). We are closely monitoring our personal protective equipment and assuring staff have needed gear. We have our pandemic reserve supplies if necessary. We also continue to educate so that visitors and staff do not use PPE when it is not indicated for a clinical situation.

Who are our local partner agencies?  
Our closest partners are Lee and Collier County Health Departments, Lee Health and Physicians Regional Medical Center, Fire, Police and EMS. Our hospital staff and numerous community partners are trained in the Federal and Local Hospital Incident Command (HICS) ‘all hazards approach’ and are prepared to partner with our local Emergency Operations Center if COVID-19 should develop into a county level emergency. There are dozens of community partners trained and available to handle a countywide emergency response for the community health and safety.

What should people do if they think they have a cold or something more?  
Call your healthcare professional if you develop symptoms, have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19, or if you have recently traveled from an area with known cases of COVID-19. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure and consist of fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

I am a resident of another country and have an order from my physician in that country for COVID-19 testing. Can I get my COVID-19 test at NCH with that order?  
No. In order to process a COVID-19 laboratory test, we need a written order (or prescription) from a physician licensed in the State of Florida. This is important to your health as you will need a local physician to guide your care if you test positive. NCH has two Immediate Care centers where practitioners can evaluate your current health and if it is determined you need testing for the COVID-19 virus, will write the order and the testing can take place. If you would like to be seen at an NCH Immediate Care center please call 239.624.8220 and it is IMPORTANT that you explain any symptoms you have so our staff can be prepared for your arrival. If you have an international travel insurance policy that covers medical care while you are in the US, we are happy to bill that on your behalf. Otherwise payment is expected at the time services are rendered.