

I Am Hospitalized With the Coronavirus

By [Jeremy Egner](#) March 27, 2020

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Jonah Markowitz for The New York Times

On March 12 I got a fever that didn't go away.

It hovered around 101 or 102 degrees for the next week, accompanied by severe fatigue and body aches. My office was already working remotely, so I powered through and kept at it, with lots of breaks and naps. I saw a doctor

via video who said it was probably the flu — possibly the coronavirus, he added, but tests were unavailable and the prescription, rest and fluids, would be the same regardless.

I naturally worried about the coronavirus, but I didn't have respiratory symptoms. I'm also a 45-year-old, generally healthy nonsmoker (I quit years ago) with none of the high-risk conditions listed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. I didn't seem like a probable Covid-19 candidate.

Then, about a week in, I began to cough. Taking deep breaths felt as if fire were shooting through my lungs. My primary care doctor, with whom I also consulted via video, thought it was pneumonia and prescribed a course of antibiotics. New York State set up a coronavirus testing site an hour from my home. When I called for an appointment, I waited on hold for 80 minutes, after which someone took my information and said someone else would call me back. No one did.

Eight days after the fever first manifested, I could barely move. My wife took me to an urgent care clinic, where I received a chest X-ray and confirmation that I had pneumonia. They swabbed me for the coronavirus but their lab was overwhelmed, and they didn't know when they would receive any results. I've still not heard from them.

I returned home in terrible shape, chest burning and wracked with chills, unable to do anything other than shudder under a blanket. My primary doctor urged my wife to take me to the E.R., which she did. There, they gave me a coronavirus test and another chest X-ray, but blood tests suggested that my oxygen and white blood cell levels were decent. They sent me home but insisted that should I feel worse, I should call them back immediately.

The next day, my temperature spiked to 103.5 degrees. We called the E.R.,

and they told us to come back. That night I was admitted to Northern Dutchess Hospital in Rhinebeck, N.Y.

The first night and day were a literal fever-dream of pricks, prods, scans and sweat. I floated in and out of consciousness and hallucinations as nurses drew blood from all over and gave me shots of blood thinner in my stomach, which became a daily routine. Someone took another chest X-ray.

On the second day I was more lucid but still felt horrendous, and a friendly doctor came in with two bits of news: The coronavirus test I took in the E.R. had come back positive and the latest X-ray wasn't good. He showed me the earlier X-ray from the E.R.: Each lung had a cloudy patch near the bottom but was otherwise clear. Then he showed me the new X-ray. It looked like some demented handyman had sprayed my lungs with insulation.

It was one of the bleakest moments of the ordeal, surpassed only by the moment when I wondered, as I hugged my 9-year-old daughter goodbye on the way to the hospital, if I would ever hug her again.

My doctor said we'd stay the course and perhaps add another antibiotic to the mix. But if things didn't start to turn around soon, he added, I would need to move into the intensive care unit. I lay back, utterly dispirited, and turned on the TV. It was on CNN. President Trump was telling someone he wanted to reopen the country by Easter.

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A few weeks ago I would have rolled my eyes and made a joke about how he should socially distance himself on some Mar-a-Lago golf course. Just go away and let the adults figure things out.

But my experience has made this pandemic much less abstract, and left me in no mood for jokes. I'm writing this from my hospital bed in Rhinebeck, on Day 14 of my Covid-pneumonia saga.

It has been miserable in general, with spikes of both awful physical pain and real terror, given the uncertainties that still surround the disease and its outcomes. I think of my wife and daughter every minute.

But I also feel humbled and awed by the care I've received from nurses, doctors, technicians, cleaning and food staff members, all of them strangers who risk getting this disease every time they come in to help me, which they do over and over, day after day, with good cheer and expertise. It is heroic and moving.

Every time the president minimizes this crisis, he is making these people's lives more difficult. When he makes the pandemic seem less serious than it is, he gives those inclined to disregard it license to do so.

The virus doesn't care about political talking points. Fewer precautions taken across the country will result in more patients. Which means that the people now helping me, and the thousands like them all over the nation, will soon have more patients than they can handle. These people — who are leaving their own families behind every day to help other people's mothers, fathers, children and grandparents — will be asked to do even more.

For me, things did start to turn around as the drugs did their work. My fever broke a day ago and my most recent chest X-ray shows signs of improvement. I am feeling better. I feel confident that I will hug my wife and daughter again, even though plenty of quarantining will remain for each of us — their health has been fine, thankfully — after I am discharged. I know how fortunate I am, thanks to the support of my family, friends and employer — and most crucially, having health insurance. I also know the

country has only begun to contend with this crisis.

I'm also lucky to have had such excellent caretakers, who help me sit up and eat and bathe and rest and heal, all the while telling me how much they are praying for me. We cannot do enough for these people, who are selflessly performing the world's most important work. They are saving our lives. They have saved mine.

As this crisis intensifies, we must think about how to make their lives easier, whether through direct bonus payments, student loan and debt forgiveness, free groceries, free child care or all of the above (or something else entirely). We must mobilize American industry to expand our medical infrastructure. People are conducting sewing drives to make masks for health care workers. That's sweet and noble, but why aren't companies like Procter & Gamble churning them out by the millions? I saw a TV ad that said Ford will work with lessees affected by the coronavirus. Great. Now why don't you get going on a few hundred thousand ventilators?

And of course, we must expand testing as rapidly as possible.

This is a national health emergency, and we must treat it with the seriousness it deserves. We must listen to the health professionals. And we must do everything we can to help them save us.

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Answers to Your Frequently Asked Questions

Updated March 24, 2020

- How does coronavirus spread?

It seems to spread [very easily from person to person](#), especially in homes, hospitals and other confined spaces. The pathogen can be carried on tiny respiratory droplets that fall as they are coughed or sneezed out. It may also be transmitted when we touch a contaminated surface and then touch our face.

- Is there a vaccine yet?

No. [The first testing in humans of an experimental vaccine began in mid-March](#). Such rapid development of a potential vaccine is unprecedented, but even if it is proved safe and effective, it probably will not be available for 12 to 18 months.

- What makes this outbreak so different?

Unlike the flu, there is no known treatment or vaccine, and [little is known about this particular virus so far](#). It seems to be more lethal than the flu, but the numbers are still uncertain. And it hits the elderly and those with underlying conditions — not just those with respiratory diseases — particularly hard.

- What should I do if I feel sick?

[If you've been exposed to the coronavirus or think you have](#), and

have a fever or symptoms like a cough or difficulty breathing, call a doctor. They should give you advice on whether you should be tested, how to get tested, and how to seek medical treatment without potentially infecting or exposing others.

- **How do I get tested?**

If you're sick and you think you've been exposed to the new coronavirus, [the C.D.C. recommends that you call your healthcare provider and explain your symptoms and fears.](#) They will decide if you need to be tested. Keep in mind that there's a chance — because of a lack of testing kits or because you're asymptomatic, for instance — you won't be able to get tested.

- **What if somebody in my family gets sick?**

If the family member doesn't need hospitalization and can be cared for at home, you should help him or her with basic needs and monitor the symptoms, while also keeping as much distance as possible, [according to guidelines issued by the C.D.C.](#) If there's space, the sick family member should stay in a separate room and use a separate bathroom. If masks are available, both the sick person and the caregiver should wear them when the caregiver enters the room. Make sure not to share any dishes or other household items and to regularly clean surfaces like counters, doorknobs, toilets and tables. Don't forget to wash your hands frequently.

- **Should I wear a mask?**

No. Unless you're already infected, or caring for someone who is, [a face mask is not recommended.](#) And stockpiling them will make it

harder for nurses and other workers to access the resources they need to help on the front lines.

- **Should I stock up on groceries?**

Plan two weeks of meals if possible. But people should not hoard food or supplies. Despite the empty shelves, [the supply chain remains strong](#). And remember to wipe the handle of the grocery cart with a disinfecting wipe and wash your hands as soon as you get home.

- **Can I go to the park?**

Yes, but make sure you keep six feet of distance between you and people who don't live in your home. [Even if you just hang out in a park, rather than go for a jog or a walk, getting some fresh air, and hopefully sunshine, is a good idea.](#)

- **Should I pull my money from the markets?**

[That's not a good idea.](#) Even if you're retired, having a balanced portfolio of stocks and bonds so that your money keeps up with inflation, or even grows, makes sense. But retirees may want to think about having enough cash set aside for a year's worth of living expenses and big payments needed over the next five years.

- **What should I do with my 401(k)?**

Watching your balance go up and down can be scary. [You may be wondering if you should decrease your contributions — don't!](#) If your employer matches any part of your contributions, make sure you're at least saving as much as you can to get that "free money."