

Why are seniors so vulnerable to COVID

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Well, it's very contagious, and it can be very severe in individuals who have underlying disease. So when you start to look at elderly patients, many elderly patients have underlying disease like Chronic obstructive lung disease, liver disease, kidney disease, all of those predisposed to a worsening of the viral infection. And also as you get older, we know that there's a effect called immunologic senescence, which really means that your immune system ages even if you don't have underlying disease, in certain situations, your immune system just ages. That's why we see so much so much shingles in a nursing home. So it's a combination of underlying diseases, but also just of the immune system. Not being as capable as it was in a younger person.

The importance of infection control

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Well, there's two different scenarios, an elderly patient with underlying disease. Even if he lives by himself. In his own home, he still is predisposed to getting a more severe disease if he does get infected. But what really makes things even worse is when elderly people are in nursing homes. When they're in nursing homes, they're crowded together. The infection control standards are not the same as they are in a hospital. There's many, many different people coming in and out of a nursing home, who could give the whole nursing home population infection like Coronavirus. The staff in the nursing home is often underpaid, not nurses but aids. They know to wash their hands they know good infection control, but sometimes they're very, very busy running from one patient to another. So all of these things exacerbate the situation with Coronavirus. Now you have older patients some immunologic senescence underlying disease credit together in a situation where infection control may not be as good as it normally would be, say in a hospital.

How nursing home outbreaks are similar in severity to cruise ships

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Well, what we're seeing is just like they were huge numbers of individuals and cruise ships that got sick. There are huge numbers Nursing Home patients that gets sick. So in many areas like Lubbock, Texas, half of all the COVID positive patients are coming from nursing homes. So the analogy is that a lot of people are together in a relatively small space. And if they're sneezing or coughing on each other, then the infection spreads. Whereas the average COVID patient infects 2.3 people, that's called the R naught, but on a cruise ship, or in a nursing home, one infected patient could infect 1020 different people. So that's kind of the the analogy is that the severity of Corona virus was first appreciated on cruise ships, and now in nursing homes and they're both areas where there's just not enough space between individuals and not enough infection control going on.

How do restrictions help

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So the positive thing about all of this is that, unlike in the community preventing Coronavirus in nursing homes should be a little bit easier. Because if you make sure there's only one entrance, let's say there's a nursing home. Right now, there's many nursing homes right now in Lubbock that have not had a single case of COVID-19. So those nursing homes, if they first of all close up all the exits except one so there's only one way to get into the nursing home, to hold off on any visitors and we understand the many problems associated with that for the residents in the nursing home, but in this particular situation, to make sure that there are no visitors, and then just guarantee that employees coming into the nursing home aren't sick so you can screen them for temperature and ask about symptoms. And so there is a great deal of hope in making sure that nursing homes don't get covered infection at all. But the strict what's mostly, the most important thing is to control who goes in and out of the nursing home.

Other changes nursing homes can make

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So few nursing home patients actually have their own primary care doctor to evaluate them early on. And so nursing homes need to be able to do that they can't just take their residents when they have an illness and put them in a van and send them to the emergency room that just doesn't work. So we need to have more face to face time between physicians and residents. And we also need to do extensive COVID testing in nursing homes right now. So we can find out if there's anybody in a nursing home that that has COVID-19. And if they do, we would separate them in in the nursing home itself.

Asymptomatic seniors

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Right, we worry about young people who are asymptomatic and on the beach and running everywhere and infecting lots of different people. But yes, elderly patients can also be asymptomatic. And if you had an asymptomatic COVID positive patient in the nursing home, that person wouldn't know any better than to potentially infect other residents in that community.