

Teenagers,

What you do right now matters, and I'm so worried no one has explained why. I'm a pediatrician, and this is what I want you to know about COVID-19:

- It's new. This strain of coronavirus, which causes a cold that can lead to pneumonia, literally didn't exist before this winter. The fact that it's new means **no one is immune**.
- It's **so contagious**. It spreads like the common cold, or worse. It lives in snot and spit. It lives on metal or plastic surfaces (your phone case? public railings?) for DAYS.
- It's **deadly**. About 1% of all people who get it die. That's 1 in 100, in case this lack of school has you slipping on your math skills.
- There's a good chance you'll catch it. Current estimates are that about **half of all the people** in the world will get coronavirus this year. People, that's 1 in 2. That's like either you, or your lab partner.
- Fortunately **you'll probably be fine**. When you catch it you might not even notice. Most people with coronavirus don't get super sick. In fact, some people, especially young people, get infected and don't feel a thing. Sigh of relief, right?
- Sorry, no. When you catch coronavirus, **it uses you** to reproduce. The virus turns your nose into a virus-making machine, so you'll spread it **without even knowing it**.
- Look, guys. **This isn't about you**. This is mostly about older people: Your grandma, your friend's grandma, the nice lady at the coffee shop that makes your chai. It's also about people with things like asthma, high blood pressure, or diabetes. When these folks get coronavirus, it's much more likely to turn into severe pneumonia. The infection goes to their lungs, and then gets worse until they can't breathe.
- **Hospitals can help** many of those people. But here's the thing: They can't help if everyone gets sick at once. There literally isn't enough room. And there aren't enough beds, nurses, masks, tests, medicines, ventilators, or oxygen tanks to go around. **If everyone gets sick at the same time, we're in big trouble.**
- This disease took us by surprise (I know, grownups suck). Doctors need time to figure out the best ways to treat this. We're kicking it into gear now, but **we need time**.
- **This is how you help**: Slow it down. Stay away from people. Don't go places where germs hang out. Don't touch things. Don't touch people. Don't let it use you! Literally, stay in your house. **Don't become a walking virus reproduction center.**

Staying home won't stop the virus (because you're going to have to go out eventually), but if we slow it down we can catch up. Do your part, buy us some time. People, do you hear me? I'm giving you the best excuse ever to stay home and do nothing. If there were ever a time to rock your introvert side, it's now. Do that, and save lives.

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