

Richard Rathe, MD

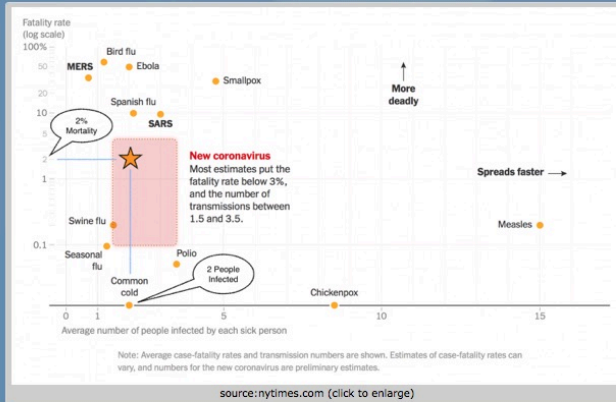
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Thoughts on the Approaching COVID19 Pandemic

BY RICHARD RATHE •• POSTED IN MEDICINE, PATIENT CARE



I've annotated this [NY Times](#) graphic, rounding the estimates for COVID19 (aka the 2019 novel coronavirus) to **2% mortality** and **2 people infected** for every one who has the disease. What this suggests is the infection rate will be similar to a bad cold season, but unlike the common cold, a significant number of people will die of the disease.

This is not good news, but it is also not catastrophic.

By comparison the **1918 "Spanish" Flu** had a similar infection rate but **killed 1 in 10!** The 1918 Flu infected approximately **one third of ALL the people on earth...** and that was before air travel!

Based on these numbers alone, up to **110 million** people in the US could be infected. **80%** of these cases should be mild, **20%** will need some form of special care in hospitals or at home, and **2% (2.2 million) could die.**

One area where the 1918 Flu differs from COVID19 is the latter **does not seem to kill children**, which is a small bright spot. However, **children may be a source of infection for vulnerable adults!**

Note that the **currently reported mortality rate** is over 3% but here **in the US we have done almost NO testing**, so the total number of infected individuals is unknown, but likely to be much higher. This means the **reported mortality rate is probably inflated** due to lack of good data. I'll stick with 2% as a conservative figure for now.

It is also important to remember one of the lessons of the 1918 epidemic, things may look better when warmer weather returns but this should **not** be reassuring. **In the spring of 1918 it looked like the disease was weakening, but it returned with a vengeance in the fall and winter!**

Social Isolation and Hand Washing

For the general public, not living with or caring for a sick person, **wearing masks** really doesn't help. **Social isolation** (eg, staying home) and **effective hand washing** remain the best things you can do to prevent getting most viral respiratory diseases (the common cold, influenza, and the new coronavirus). Just being in the same room with a sick person is not that risky, but **touching surfaces** and objects in that room and then **touching your face** is a good way to catch one of these viruses. Note that hand washing studies suggest we generally **neglect our fingertips** (including the nails) and wrists.



The best information available comes from [CDC](#) and [WHO](#) (which I consider the best source since it is not caught up in US political shenanigans). For up-to-date worldwide information [download the most recent WHO Situation Report](#).

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Richard Rathe

Dr. Rathe joined the University of Florida in 1990 to develop the informatics program for the College of Medicine. Prior to his arrival, he completed a two year informatics fellowship at the Harvard School of Public Health. More... Follow me on Twitter!

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