

Opinion: In this COVID-19 crisis, you're the superhero we all need

Mitch Shiller, Special to Montreal Gazette Updated: March 18, 2020

This is not a drill.

Imagine you were given a box of Smarties. In the box, three of the 100 Smarties are poisonous and could kill you. You would keep the box closed. You wouldn't eat the Smarties. The Coronavirus is that box of Smarties. We must avoid opening the box.

So how do we do that?

By practicing social distancing.

Not just me and you. But everyone. Avoid human contact wherever possible. Work from home. Go out only for essentials. If you are over 70, don't go out at all.

Kids who are home from school should not be visiting friends.

Wash your hands frequently. Keep a metre away from other people.

Actively look for breaks in your protective bubble. Seal them.

Your choices today may save your life, a family member, a friend, a friend's relative. The mathematics of epidemics means that acting today will avoid a huge number of potential cases a week from now.

Those of us in the medical profession are going to be at war for the next month or two. Please help us to prevent having to make horrible choices in the care we provide.

What else can you do?

Support each other. Staying home is isolating and lonely. Reach out to friends and relatives. Call them. FaceTime them.

Small businesses will be under extreme pressure to stay solvent. Get takeout from your favourite restaurant. Tip generously. Wash your hands immediately upon entering your house.

Look on social media to see ways you can help vulnerable people locally, but always respect social distancing.

If you are feeling stressed, take a break. Put down your tablet or phone. Go for a walk. Meditate.

The good news ... and yes there is good news: We know from other countries that these actions combined with government solutions such as drive by testing and electronic notification will control this virus. But it will take a couple months.

Our lives will be different afterward. We will have many limitations on our activities until there is a vaccine and better treatments. But these will come.

We live in a wonderful time. The number of medical papers published on this virus in the last week is staggering. We are learning a lot about it. We have the ability to communicate our successes and failures fighting the virus instantly and across the globe. We have sequenced the genome of the virus. Multiple groups are working on vaccines and treatments.

Humans shine when we co-operate. We will see wonderful stories of compassion and resilience. Take strength from them.

We are all used to the Hollywood movie where the superhero flies in at the last moment to save the day. In this movie, we are all superheroes.

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