

Loggers – the ultimate social distancers

by Niels de Hoop

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My next-door neighbor was off work for two weeks in March while his workplace, an “essential industry” making pipes, was being sanitized. A co-worker of his caught COVID-19. The co-worker’s wife actually brought it home. Both ended up in the hospital. The wife recovered and went home. The co-worker did not.

Other corona patients are interviewed on TV and say it was just like a mild cold.

So, what’s really going on? Well, a lot of things, mostly based on lack of knowledge:

1. There are many species of corona viruses. Four species of the common cold are corona viruses (HCov-229E, -NL63, -OC43, and -HKU1).
2. Seven species and sub-species of corona viruses are known to infect humans, including the 4 above. Many more infect animals.
3. Our biology teachers taught us that viruses and bacteria mutate easily. With that in mind, how many strains of COVID-19 are we really dealing with?
4. COVID-19 is new, first identified in December 2019, so tests to determine if you have COVID-19 are new.
5. New tests generally have accuracy problems. Think of the early pregnancy tests (EPT) of the 1970s with 30% to 50% false positives.
6. Some people are more immune than others.
7. If you’ve had the flu, you might actually be more susceptible to COVID-19 – your body might overreact using the wrong “weapons.” This may be why children are not affected much, but they can be carriers who infect grandparents.
8. Colds, flu’s and pneumonia haven’t gone anywhere. A person might have several germs at the same time. In fact, they often do.

For now, this is what we know:

1. Anyone who catches COVID-19 is 10 times more likely to die from it, compared to the regular flu.
2. Some middle-age people who needed hospitalization described it as a terrifying near-death experience.
3. Most of the fatalities happen to people with underlying health conditions, usually high blood pressure, heart conditions and diabetes.
4. Many people have high blood pressure, diabetes, etc., including loggers and family members of loggers.

What’s a logger to do?

Well, start with something that loggers do best – Social Distancing. This works great on the job. Each operator and truck driver stays in his own machine and communicates through hand signals, radio or cell phone. The problem, of course, is the gathering spots – lunch time at the set, commuting in the crew truck, and hugging the kids at home.

Changing our habits a little can make a big difference. We can do things like stay a little farther apart at lunch, but still close enough for conversation. We can all wash hands or use hand sanitizer before eating (hand sanitizer is a substitute for washing; washing hands is better). Truck drivers can use hand sanitizer when leaving the set and when leaving the millyard.

If carpooling, avoiding the Max (or recirculate) setting on the AC will allow more fresh air in. The Max setting is simply a recirculate setting – nothing Max about it.

Refueling at the convenience store is another “gathering” spot. Use gloves at the fuel pump. Use hand sanitizer after leaving and before eating that snack or opening that pack of cigarettes.

Home might actually be the worst place in terms of getting sick, especially if there are children at home. Schools and ball sports are germ factories, including hepatitis, measles and other unpleasant infections. Teach children to wash hands as soon as they get home. Hold family powwows to discuss what each person can do to slow the transmission of diseases.

All the things that help prevent colds and flu’s apply to COVID-19, so there is a double benefit. This includes eating healthy and getting adequate sleep.

Dealing with COVID-19 may seem like a New Orleans problem (and it is), but only “social distancing” will keep it out of the rural areas. One thing to note is that when rural people catch COVID-19, they are more likely to die from it. In fact, in Louisiana, the fatality rate is the worst in Winn and Red River parishes.

Future Outlook:

The peak of the COVID-19 outbreak is moving across the country like a wave. As I write this, New Orleans just peaked, but its numbers are still high. Baton Rouge appears to be at its peak. Caddo/Bossier is still rising. The numbers in the rural areas will likely remain low but will likely peak in another week. Statewide, the numbers should approach zero in early or mid-May.

If we form new and better habits of cleanliness and social distancing, we can reduce transmission of other diseases. For example, cholera, diphtheria, tetanus and several other serious diseases were once common but are now rare in this country thanks to education about the importance of cleanliness. However, it is human nature to get lax about these things, so we still need to remind each other occasionally.

If you read about the Spanish flu, it provides an interesting history lesson. It appears to have originated in Indonesia or southeastern Asia in 1917, raced through the Austrian and German troops of World War I, made its way to Boston, where it mutated and became really severe. Then, it raced across America, killing half a million. The mutated form also made its way back to Europe with the American troops, by which time it caught the

attention of news reporters, who had been fixated on the war. One-third of the people in the world became infected, and ten to twenty percent of the infected people died.

One of the problems with COVID-19 is that it takes time to develop a vaccine. This means that COVID-19 may linger a little this summer and return next winter.

It doesn't hurt to plan. This plan should include a financial plan. If it becomes necessary to quarantine some or all of the crew, could the company survive economically? Would the bank be willing to extend loans on equipment if the operation were shut down for a month? This scenario was once considered unlikely, but it's now realistic. The consequences could be severe should it happen. Therefore, it might make an interesting safety meeting topic, which would be a good way to collect ideas from crew members.

Meanwhile, work on a short-term plan to prevent all diseases. Discuss hygiene and health with the crew members and set up a plan to minimize colds and flus. Healthy crew members are necessary for a healthy operation.

C.F. "Niels" de Hoop is an Associate Professor at the Louisiana Forest Products Development Center, School of Renewable Natural Resources, Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, LSU AgCenter. Contact: cdehoop@lsu.edu; 225-578-4242. His continuing research on logging accidents is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, McIntire Stennis project # LAB94417.

Some good overview sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronavirus_disease

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronavirus_disease_2019

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronavirus>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_flu

Louisiana: <http://ldh.la.gov/>

Louisiana numbers: <http://ldh.la.gov/Coronavirus/>

One of the models you see on TV, although it needs better updating as of this writing:

<https://covid19.healthdata.org/united-states-of-america/louisiana>

Ag workers:

<https://www.uthct.edu/swagc-covid19-resources-for-agricultural-workers>

OSHA: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/> .