If you’re like most of us, you’ve probably been glued to the news for the past several weeks to stay on top of the latest information available about the novel coronavirus, also called COVID-19. While this can be a scary and uncertain time for families, having a chronic health condition or having a child with a chronic health condition can make the situation seem even more dire. We understand that patients with a chronic colorectal diagnosis, specifically anorectal malformations and Hirschsprung disease, have unique needs and considerations. We have been getting many questions from patients across the country, and we want to provide some information that we hope can ease your mind as we navigate this unprecedented situation together. We hear you! For this reason, we have compiled a list of frequent questions and answers in order to help clarify any confusion and ease some of your anxiety.

**Are patients with anorectal malformations or Hirschsprung Disease more likely to contract COVID-19, and are they at risk of more serious complications?**

This is one of the most common questions we have seen since the onset of this pandemic. There is an abundance of literature available discussing the importance of immunity in the gut, and as a group of healthcare providers for this unique population, we have been scouring the literature looking for the answer to this question. The good news is that although the data is still emerging about this new strain of coronavirus, what we know so far is that the colorectal population isn’t at any higher risk of contracting COVID-19 or suffering severe complications of COVID-19 than the average population. This means that you don’t need special restrictions based solely on your colorectal diagnosis. The most important way to prevent the spread is to practice social distancing, practice good hand hygiene, and avoid touching your face as much as possible.

We do know that based on the current information available, COVID-19 RNA can be found in stool. It is not yet known for certain whether or not this means that the virus is transmissible through the oral fecal route, but the important thing to remember is that you should ALWAYS practice good hand hygiene, including after cleaning up in the bathroom. Excellent handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of this and many other viral infections.

We also know that some studies are showing that some patients who had COVID-19 experienced nausea, abdominal pain, and diarrhea prior to experiencing the respiratory symptoms more frequently associated with the infection. There doesn’t appear to be any colorectal diagnosis associated with the patients who experienced these symptoms, so our patients are not any more or less likely to experience these symptoms in addition to the typical cough, fever and shortness of breath. Please be sure to reach out to your providers by phone prior to going to a healthcare setting. Many patients can and should continue to monitor their symptoms at home before utilizing resources that require face to face contact. Whether you’re experiencing GI or respiratory symptoms, please follow the CDC guidelines in terms of when to be seen in person.

**If you have a known immune deficiency or cardiac or respiratory issues in addition to your colorectal diagnosis, you should follow the advice of your providers in those specialties.**
I’m worried about supplies, what do I do if I can’t get what I need to do my flushes or complete my medication regimen?

With the increased demand of overall sanitary needs, we are seeing that it is becoming more difficult to find some of your supply needs. For those on a daily bowel flush/enema program, it is becoming difficult to find glycerin or castile soap. These are common products for medical use, but also for general sanitation/hygiene use. There are other gentle irritants that can be used during this time if you are unable to find your usual products. You should reach out to your clinical provider to discuss what product they would like you to use during this time. Note that the products are not directly comparable in the strength, so your flush/enema mixture may need to be adjusted to achieve the same results.

Homecare services and pharmacies may also be behind in their delivery systems. From a bowel perspective, it is medically safe to use your products longer than you normally have been, as long as the product is still functioning well for you. Continue to wash your products well with soap and water.

I feel navigating our regular care is already stressful enough for my child. Is it ok to talk with them about COVID-19?

New information is coming out daily, with multiple sources of news accessible by many means and your child is likely aware that something big is going on. Be honest and accurate and take this opportunity to reinforce education on proper hand hygiene. Children often react to the adults around them so being prepared and educated to answer their questions can go a long way in helping your child feel properly supported. The CDC has some great tips you can reference when preparing to talk to your children about the COVID-19 pandemic. Visit this website for information: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html

In general, any time you have a concern specific to your child’s (or your) condition, please do not hesitate to reach out to your healthcare team. We will get through this together!

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