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COVID-19: Tips for Discussing COVID-19 With Friends and Colleagues

With the rising concerns, and even some panic, about the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., it's important to be careful about how we discuss the pandemic with friends and colleagues.

Anthony Fauci, M.D., director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, part of the National Institutes of Health, recently shared these tips on a podcast presented by NEJM Journal Watch, a digital and print publication for healthcare clinicians.

Here are Dr. Fauci's five tips:

1. Give "the broad picture without unnecessarily sugarcoating." For example, tell them that according to data currently available, 80 percent of the people who become infected recover well, but those with underlying conditions have a much higher chance of having complications. Children and young people, however, "do really, really well with this [infection]."
2. Ask friends and colleagues not to take on "the burden of the broader global health issue" because in the U.S., in general, the risk of infection is low, especially for people in a community where the infection is not spreading on its own.
3. For people living in communities where the infection does appear to be spreading on its own, including Seattle, Los Angeles, New York City, and certain regions of Florida, tell them to separate themselves from other people as much as possible. "No crowds. Don't get on crowded planes if you're a senior citizen, particularly with an underlying condition," he said.
4. Tell patients to wash their hands, and if they live with someone who is immunocompromised, they "almost have to act like [they themselves] are infected."

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5. Advise people to check CDC.gov and coronavirus.gov for updates and information related to the pandemic.

Said Dr. Fauci, "I want [people] not to panic because panic gets people to do unreasonable things that are even counterproductive to what you're trying to do from a public health standpoint. You might overwhelm systems when you don't need to overwhelm systems. But on the other hand, without panicking and without making it dominate your life, pay attention to the fact that you have to act differently. Like you've never acted before."

Here is a link to the NEJM Journal Watch podcast.

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