

Bastyr University - Institutional Statement of Facts and Values Pertinent to COVID-19

This document was adapted for use by Bastyr University, from a statement issued on August 31, 2020, from our colleagues at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine.

The purpose of this statement is to provide students and faculty guidance regarding COVID-19 public health recommendations and communications.

COVID-19 is a new disease that has rapidly spread around the world. While there is uncertainty inherent in our situation and there is sometimes conflicting information presented in the media and by public health and political leaders, there is enough known about the novel coronavirus and its risks that Bastyr University stands by the following positions:

- **Millions affected:** COVID-19 is a public health emergency. In a very short period of time, millions have been infected and hundreds of thousands have died around the world.
- **Shared vulnerability and responsibility:** All members of society share responsibility in adhering to public health measures in order to protect themselves and members of at-risk populations. There are particular demographics that are now known to be especially vulnerable to this disease, or have been disproportionately affected by it, notably: the elderly; people with comorbidities; front-line healthcare providers and essential workers; and those suffering social inequities such as systemic racism. Even those who are younger and in good health are still at risk from this virus – they can also become very sick and possibly die from the infection. There is also emerging evidence that even “mild” infections may result in longer debilitating illnesses than was first understood.
- **Limited treatment options:** Currently, there is no proven or effective prevention treatment for this novel coronavirus, and treatments are still limited in their application/efficacy. Vaccines are also still in development. We will stay informed regarding this changing landscape.

- **Challenges to control of this disease:**

Particularly challenging aspects in the control of this pandemic are:

- a) this infection can be spread by people before they become symptomatic;
- b) one person can infect many others, leading to exponential growth in the number of infected people
- c) healthcare infrastructure and resources can be overwhelmed as a result of cases not being contained.

- **Essential prevention:**

Due to the facts of this disease process, public health safety measures are therefore vital to slow the spread of the disease.

Key behaviors to adopt are physical distancing, mask-wearing, and self-isolating after possible exposure to the virus or when experiencing symptoms associated with the infection. Surface contamination does not appear to be a major vector for COVID-19, but since the data are incomplete and other contagious diseases are known to spread in this manner, proper hand hygiene and disinfection of frequently touched public surfaces such as door handles and elevator buttons are recommended.

- **Professional responsibilities:**

Public trust in public health measures is essential to the containment of this disease. As healthcare providers and educators, naturopathic doctors and students must use their patient interactions, platforms, and public standing to share accurate information based on the preponderance of evidence that supports and protects public health. This is a matter of public safety and the credibility of the profession as a whole. Being proactive in educating our patients and community in public health processes meets two tenets of naturopathic medicine – *docere* – doctor as teacher, and *primum non nocere* – first do no harm.

- **Responsible communications:**

Any suggestion that lifestyle and diet alone can prevent or greatly mitigate one's risk of COVID-19 infection or the severity of disease is not supported by current evidence, is not responsible, and may inadvertently blame victims for factors beyond their control.

- **Knowledge is continually evolving:**

We, as current and future health care providers, must welcome new discoveries, adapt our thinking as new information emerges, and help our patients and the public understand and follow revised public health recommendations. This statement may also require revision as more is discovered and the situation develops

The above facts and values align with naturopathic principles and the naturopathic oath: to first do no harm, to teach by words and example to prevent disease, and to do this in the service of humanity.

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