

Could your cough be a sign of something more serious?

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EARLY last month, just like most people I know, I had a pesky cough that wouldn't go away despite taking medicines. In group chats I have with friends and family, I was told to isolate myself even if I was not experiencing any other symptoms that might be related to COVID. I got tested after two weeks of isolation. I was negative. But what if it was coronavirus, and since I wasn't feeling anything apart from the itchy throat that caused violent coughing, I just went about my normal routine, including going outside?

In a recent etalk titled "Apat na Sapat at Dapat Tandaan Tungkol sa Ubo" hosted by Suzi Entrata-Abrera that streamed on GMA News Facebook page, Dr. Jondi Buensalido, an infectious disease expert, gave a rather simple and straightforward advice that just might save lives.

Dr. Buensalido advised people with cough to immediately isolate themselves while they are unsure as to why they are coughing to prevent the possibility of infecting others with the coronavirus and then take the proper medicines to ensure a timely cure.

In the etalk, Buensalido clarified issues and concerns related to cough in this time of pandemic, including the four important things that people need to know: that cough may be infectious if the cause is a viral or bacterial infection; that there are particular medicines for every type of cough; that cough needs to be treated immediately if the cause of the cough needs prompt treatment; and that cough is not a side effect of COVID-19 vaccines.

The medical expert said even if there is no confirmation yet that COVID-19 is the cause of the cough, the prudent thing to do is to isolate right away, wear a mask, and seek medical help. "Because we are in a pandemic, it is safer to treat cough initially as infectious because there is a big chance that it is due to the coronavirus. Staying away from other people protects those around you, while the cause of the cough is still being ascertained."

A persistent cough is one of the top symptoms of COVID-19 and also the major way that the coronavirus is spread, according to health experts. "If you have a cough, observe, and if it persists and becomes worse, it could be infectious so you have to isolate, drink plenty of fluids, rest, and go to a doctor to have a second set of expert eyes evaluate if it is infectious or not," the doctor said.

Buensalido said there are several types of cough: the infectious ones caused by virus and bacteria, and the non-infectious ones triggered by allergies or when something inadvertently blocked your airway that prompts the body to expel it through coughing.

For cough that is dry and bothersome, Buensalido said it is best to treat them with antitussive medicines. Those with phlegm, or the productive type, mucolytic medicines like carbocisteine, would be more appropriate.

There are also different medications for cough triggered by asthma and allergies. Buensalido stressed that home remedies — like drinking plenty of water, gargling with warm salt water, taking honey, drinking boiled lagundi leaves concoction, and steaming (suob) — will provide relief but will not necessarily cure the cough.

“Those are supportive treatments...

There is care and cure, and these are in the “care” part because they make the patient feel better. These aren’t cures, but may still help.”

He advised people to ensure cough, and especially the one causing it, is cured in a timely manner because it could worsen and trigger complications like pneumonia, as what has become prevalent in this time of COVID-19.

“Compared to other viruses, SARSCoV-2 virus is more potentially lifethreatening so we should be more careful with respiratory infections caused by it. These days, because the enemy is worse, there is increased benefit in shortening the illness and decreasing the severity.”

There is also the danger of double-sickening, where patients develop a more severe cough just after their condition has improved and may suggest a secondary bacterial infection. Another way to help speed up the recovery process is to take vitamins and cough medicines that are fortified with zinc. Zinc, Buensalido said, shortens the duration of viral illnesses by around two to three days. He also clarified that cough is not a side effect of COVID-19 vaccines.

“If you look at the results of Phase 3 clinical trials, cough is not one of those (vaccine side effects). Cough happens when something gets into your airways and you need to expel it. Vaccines are injected into the muscle and you will not have a cough because of something in the muscle. Coughing is not one of those (side effects), unless you have an allergic reaction that will cause shortness of breath or difficulty of breathing; but this is rare.”

“The Apat na Sapat at Dapat Tandaan Tungkol sa Ubo” etalk was presented by Solmux Advance with Zinc, supported by several non-government organization. It is the first of a series for the year.

Apart from GMA News Facebook page, the etalk also aired on GMA Brand Room, regional media Facebook pages, several Church-based and nongovernment networks.