

Common terminology associated with illness outbreaks

The novel corona virus COVID-19 was the dominant story of the first months of 2020. As new information emerged and the virus spread from its epicenter in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, to other areas of Asia, Europe and the United States, various world health experts briefed the public on the proper protocol they believed would help stall the spread of this contagious virus.

The conveyance of this information introduced the public to terminology that previously may only have been known to those within the medical community. So that people may act in a productive and informed manner, here are common words and phrases associated with global health concerns.

Community spread: The spread of a disease among a certain area in which there is no direct knowledge of how or when someone caught the disease.

Epidemiology: This is a branch



of medicine that deals with the incidence, distribution and possible control of disease, as well as patterns and determinants of illnesses. An epidemic is a situation when a disease spreads rapidly among many people and in higher concentrations than normal.

Pandemic: This relates to the geographical spread of a disease that

affects a whole country or the entire world, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Pandemic does not refer to the severity or mortality of an illness, just how far it has traveled.

PPE: This stands for personal protective equipment. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration says this is gear worn to minimize ex-

posure to hazards that cause serious workplace injuries and illnesses. PPE may include gloves, safety glasses, masks, and gowns in healthcare settings.

Presumptive case: A presumptive case or presumptive positive case is one in which symptoms seemingly match the illness but a diagnosis has not yet been confirmed. A presumptive case is not a definitive case.

Quarantine: This is a restriction on the movement of people and goods, which is intended to prevent the spread of pests or diseases. Quarantines may be mandated or voluntary.

Social distancing: Social distancing refers to limiting contact or other interactions with people in an effort to help reduce the likelihood of disease contraction and spread. This largely involves modifying operations so that large crowds do not congregate at places like universities and colleges, sporting events, meetings, and conferences.



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