This first-hand account was sent to a professional listserv. It has been edited to maintain anonymity. It might help illustrate how interconnected we all are.

Dear Colleagues,

I thought I would share my experience as a [professional who sees clients in a 1-on-1 setting] who was exposed to coronavirus in my office setting, got pneumonia, was put on quarantine at home for a week by the county public health department and was released today.

I never imagined we in our line of work could be at risk, but I was exposed twice to someone who tested positive for coronavirus a few days after I developed pneumonia and the worst dry cough I have ever had. My [client] was not showing any symptoms while in my office but he had daily contact with a relative who got pneumonia and corona virus and has now been hospitalized about 2 weeks, presently in ICU.

My symptoms came on with a dry cough that worsened dramatically ... I woke up to a terrible sound and it was coming from my chest - extreme wheezing upon exhale and a deep dry cough. I only had a small fever of around 100.1 and there was no typical cold symptoms like a runny nose, sore throat, or headache. Just this terrible dry cough. And being unable to lie down or I would start choking in my sleep.

When I was informed of my exposure, I called my [doctor and] … I was told to go to [the emergency room] where I was met in the parking lot and guided in a side door to a glass enclosed exam room. My temp was not at the County’s critical value of 100.4 (it was 100.1) so I was sent home. Two days later the county called and told me I was on legal quarantine and would face a misdemeanor if I left my property. Because my 9 yr old granddaughter was coughing just like me, she was also quarantined. When her school found out, they sent my kindergartener grandson home, too. He never developed symptoms. My daughter works at their school, and she was sent home, too.

We were first tested on …Day 9 of my pneumonia… when the county came to my house to collect nasal and throat swabs. Two days later I was told my test result was “indeterminate” and my granddaughter was negative. The test was repeated a second time - on day 11 of my illness - and it came back negative today. With that, we were released from quarantine this afternoon. What a relief to be free! Losing your freedom is worse than I expected. I still have coughing but have been told it’s a remnant of the pneumonia that may last for weeks.

In the meantime, the CDC called me and made me go through the 14 days prior to my illness and tell them where i went and who I saw. It got complicated when they said they would want [client] names if I tested positive. I consulted with the [professional] attorney who was very helpful to me and informed me that for public health purposes I might need to give names and contact numbers. Fortunately, it never came to that, but I was worried.

I ended up deciding to tell my [clients] what had happened so they could be on guard in case they developed symptoms. These were very difficult messages to deliver. Much to my surprise, they all handled it well. They appreciated me being open with them and not keeping it from them. Given that the virus can survive for up to 9 days on an inanimate surface, I felt it was their right to know this was a possible risk. Thus far, no one has gotten ill, and I am so grateful for that. I will make sure my office is sanitized before returning to work next week. I can only hope this does not adversely affect my future practice and [clients] in any way.

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I wrote this long description of my experience to provide Information and to warn others to be careful. Patients with no symptoms can still be positive, and if they cough within 6 ft of you it could be transmitted. Similarly, they could touch your pen, furniture, doorknob to office or restroom, sink handle, and transmit it to you. This has been a very surreal and scary experience, and I hope sharing my story helps you all to stay safe.

Last of all, I now understand the importance of having Income replacement insurance for events such as this.  I did not have it, and as a single parent with adult kids and grandchildren dependent on me, 2 weeks of no income from private practice is going to make life rough. I have learned a lot from this experience, and I hope my story helps you prepare and stay safe.