

Coping with COVID-19 with an Immunocompromised Child

By Cameron Rhodes

My step-daughter, Selena, was diagnosed with cancer in November of 2017 at the age of 3. She had to undergo two surgeries, many months of chemo therapy, and is now missing a kidney and part of her lung. This was a very scary time and health was constantly on the minds of our family. We didn't go anywhere without a mask, washed our hands constantly, had to avoid anyone who seemed like they might be sick. My wife, then girlfriend, and I had to limit our exposure because we knew that anything we caught would get her and be twice as worse. If we came down with a cough or a runny nose, we either had to isolate to a different part of the house or have Selena stay with her grandparents until we got better to try and keep her from catching anything. Selena missed going to preschool so that she would have less exposure and keep getting healthy. Even with her going into remission in June of 2018, she was diagnosed with asthma after a winter cold turned to pneumonia and she had to be hospitalized in late 2019. The health of her immune system has been a never ending concern.

The rise of COVID-19 has been a living nightmare. The constant worry of her getting sick came back and hit like a truck. Watching the number of cases rise throughout the world and in the US and the lack of response was awful. As the virus continued to spread, eventually schools and business were shut down. My wife and step-daughter would be at home and not have to go out, but I did.

I was considered an essential worker due to working with government contracts and everyday had to work in close proximity of others. I heard or talked to multiple coworkers who said it was only the flu and corona wasn't a big deal. It would pass and it wouldn't affect most people, so why should we have to worry? But I worried. Even if most people would survive it, my daughter might not. She was at the forefront of my mind every time someone complained about stores closing or joked about keeping distant from one another. These were the people who would destroy my family because of their carelessness.

Every day of work I had to be on my guard. When work sent home those that could work remotely, I still had to work on site. Even as my workplace began to implement precautions like telling people to stay 6 apart, I had to side step around those that would otherwise walk right past you. I would have to hang back and wait while others would crowd into the bathroom. I avoided lunch rooms and break areas, only eating in my car. I wore gloves all day and wiped my work surface multiple times a day. When I got home, I had to immediately put my work cloths in the wash and wipe everything I took with me to work. I would have to tell my daughter to not hug me until I had changed.

I hated having to go to work. They said that the work we did was important and thank you for working during these hard times, but it didn't matter. I wasn't concerned about myself or about the work I was doing. I was risking my daughter's life every single day so that someone else could profit. I had to risk her life because without my income my family wouldn't have a house to live in or food to eat. I was forced to put her on the line whether I wanted to or not. It was crushing me inside. How would I live with myself if she got sick because I had to go to work? If she died? I asked myself these questions every single day.

Finally, after over a month of increased rules and precautionary measures at work, the implemented a system so you could apply to stay home with pay if you or a family member were at high risk. It took two weeks of back and forth paperwork, but at long last it was approved. The constant daily stress subsided to a much more manageable level.

There is still some concern. I have to be cautious when picking up groceries, even though we only use curbside pickup. I had to wait outside of Walmart at open to get toilet paper and then decontaminate upon returning home. I worry about the return of COVID-19 in the fall and if these precautions will be implemented any faster or will we have to same slow reaction. I think about all of those still not able to leave work; risking the lives of those they love against their will. I worry for those less fortunate who don't have income now and are at risk of losing everything because of something out of their hands.

I think what I worry most about after all that has happened this year is nothing changing.