

Meet Helen

Covenant Health Launches New COVID-19 Chat Assistant



You've been told you are supposed to stay home, but you have a fever and a cough. Ordinarily, you would get in the car and drive to a clinic or make an appointment to see your family doctor. Things are different these days, though, and hardly anything seems ordinary anymore.

During a time of social distancing, the arrival of the COVID-19 virus in East Tennessee has challenged many of us to think and react differently. We're relying more on virtual technology to connect us with others, and that includes how we connect with medical care.

Meet Helen, Covenant Health's newest team member. Helen is an on-

line, interactive chat assistant who guides patients through their COVID-19 symptoms and virtually connects them with medical care options.

"We're very excited to offer this type of digital service right now," says Covenant Health Chief Medical Informatics Officer Mandy Halford, MD. "In the face of this pandemic, our team is working diligently to create innovative solutions that allow our patients to connect with their care team from the comfort of their homes."

Helen guides users through a process to help rule out COVID-19 or move toward a diagnosis. She can connect users with nurses who can an-

swer specific care questions and schedule telehealth appointments with a medical provider.

A New Way to Get Answers

When users first go online and connect with Helen, they are guided through a checklist of symptoms. The checklist is based on the most current COVID-19 guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

"We know that the majority of COVID-19 patients will experience mild or moderate symptoms," says Dr. Halford. "We can help those patients check their symptoms and determine the next appropriate steps for care, while encouraging

self-isolation."

If patients have questions about their symptoms after the assessment, the interactive chat assistant can help. That's when Helen can be used to connect the patient with a nurse.

"They can chat for free with one of our nurses and get the answers they need about their individual situation," Dr. Halford says. "Our nurses can also help the patient navigate to the right level of care, including scheduling a telehealth session with their primary care physician or one of our medical providers."

Telehealth sessions allow patients with a mobile device or a computer to video chat with a medical provider without

driving to a doctor's office. During the virtual appointment the provider can assess the patient, prescribe treatment and order COVID-19 testing if needed.

Patients who report life-threatening symptoms are still encouraged to call 911 or go to the local emergency department. Helen can help with that, too.

"Covenant Health hospitals ask suspected COVID-19 patients to call ahead before going to the emergency department," Dr. Halford says. "Helen and our nursing team can assist the patient with calling ahead, and will even text them a link that includes a Google map and phone number."

The symptoms of COVID-19 include a fever, sore throat, coughing and shortness of breath. If you have these symptoms, Helen is ready to help. You can now connect with her at [TreatedWell.com](https://www.treatedwell.com) and other websites for Covenant Health hospitals and medical practices.

The symptom checker used by Helen is only for adults 18 years of age and older. All questions about COVID-19 for patients under 18 years of age should be directed to the child's pediatrician. For more information about Helen, visit [CovenantHealth.com/coronavirus/covid-19-screening-tool](https://www.covenant-health.com/coronavirus/covid-19-screening-tool).

The Doctor Will See You Now — on Your Phone

To ensure the health and safety of patients and staff from the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19), Covenant Medical Group (CMG) practices are now offering "telehealth" visits for their patients. This means patients can schedule appointments where they video conference with their provider over the phone, tablet, or computer, instead of physically coming into the office.

"We want our patients to be safe," says internist Michael Bernard, MD. "It's in their best interest to stay home."



When patients call a CMG office, they are now encouraged to make an appointment through the telehealth system. Dr.

Bernard says the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

"I think some of our older patients are

somewhat hesitant because of the technological aspect of it, but we're able to walk them through it," Dr. Bernard says. "Patients are very surprised by how good the communication is and by how straightforward the visits are."

During a visit online, Dr. Bernard is able to determine if the patient needs to come into the office or if diagnostic testing needs to be arranged. If not, the doctor can prescribe medication and offer sound medical advice. Sometimes

patients only need a doctor

to answer some questions and calm their fears.

Dr. Bernard says the importance of staying home can't be overstated during this pandemic. He became even more convinced when he volunteered to help treat patients in New York but was turned down because he is over the age of 50.

"I think that just sheds light on how dangerous it can be to be out in public, even though we think of ourselves as being healthy," Dr. Bernard says. "Certainly if you're over the age of 60 or you have any comorbidities,

you shouldn't be out. You should be at home."

Telehealth visits offer one-on-one time with a health care provider minus in-office distractions. Dr. Bernard says it's been so successful that he can easily envision seeing patients online beyond the pandemic.

"I think the patients really enjoy the convenience and the communication, and I think we'll see this continue even after COVID-19 is gone," Dr. Bernard says. "Hopefully that's sooner rather than later."

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