

# VMG COVID-19 UPDATE

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

Issue # 58

We continue to “reopen” across the country while the virus is still here and there are no effective treatments and no vaccine. And in addition, what some have called the “urgent moral stakes” of our time is forcing many to make choices between staying safe (or safer) and participating in vital protests and calling for reform in public spaces.

Arizona and other previously “safer” states are now experiencing a surge in COVID-19. Probable cases have been undercounted in many other states. We have not yet begun to see the effects of the protest marches and responses to the marches on the rates of infection. Add to that the effects of tear gas and pepper spray on the lungs of protestors, and crowding of those arrested, and you have what Anthony Fauci calls the perfect recipe for spread of the virus.

Yet some hopeful things are happening. First we have the public protests and outcry to finally deal with racism and racial disparities in health as well as in policing. The governor of Kentucky, Andy Beshear, cited the racial disparities in health care that have been underlined in the state by the pandemic.

*“In our health-care system, the inequalities have been laid bare and exposed by this covid-19 pandemic and the results of inequality in health care have been shown in depth,” Beshear [said](#). “By allowing this type of inequality to exist for as long as it has, we see African Americans dying at twice the rate that they make up of the population ... it shouldn't have taken this pandemic or these demonstrations for us to commit to ending it.”* He is calling for providing health insurance to all black (and presumably all) residents in his state.

Around the country there is finally some acknowledgment of the effects of racism on health and mortality. Gaps of 10 or more year’s life expectancy in nearby or neighboring zip codes are not uncommon. Why? It’s what we’ve called “social determinants” and the “social gradient.” The social gradient in health is a term used to describe the phenomenon whereby people who are less advantaged in terms of socioeconomic position have worse health (and shorter lives) than those who are more advantaged. There is good data that early child development and the future ability to function fully in society is related to poverty and the social determinants. This suggests that education, in our traditional view, is not enough. *Early childhood* education benefits all children. And the benefit for children in poverty is greater (and therefore a help in later efforts to take advantage of education).

A final sad irony: It’s been reported that George Floyd survived COVID-19 in April but died under the knee of police in May.

Some people are finding ways to protest more safely. In Oakland, the “caravan for justice” has protesters in cars gathering to be part of the movement. And many protesters are now wearing masks (after going without for a while).

So we have the pandemic, the economic meltdown (which affects minority neighborhoods and families more), and the realization of years and years of social injustice coming to everyone’s attention now.

What to do? Keep talking, keep activating whatever channels you have to not let this moment slip and finally, let's consider restorative justice. Here's an idea that's been discussed before and may be closer to reality now. In South Africa they started a Truth and Reconciliation Commission after Apartheid. Here's a link: <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/> Think about it. Consider this approach (or something like it for the U.S.) and talk with your neighbors and your senators and representatives.

### **State and Regional**

The state now has the capacity for about 30,000 tests per day but only about 8000 are being done. We're not sure why, especially since we were an early "leader" in testing.

The governor is proceeding with Phase 2 reopening. This is the second day. Across the Commonwealth, business owners are trying to consider all the steps in reopening as safely as possible. But there really is no roadmap in our times for this. We're going to learn what works and does not work as we go. But it does seem certain that social/physical distancing will be with us for a long time.

### **At VMG**

Our SOHCO (Single Overriding Healthcare Communication Objective) remains provide necessary care as safely as possible for our patients, staff, and practitioners. Practically, that means staying vigilant for possible improvements and spotting problems as they develop.

Information for Gina:

Governor Baker announced Phase II for reopening the State bringing additional requirements to health care. These are being reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team and appropriate guidelines are in development.

ASPC is opening scheduled for June 15<sup>th</sup>. Patients are being notified.

Even though some parents are still hesitant to schedule Pedi Wellness visits we are ready for them. Both EHC & NHC are now ready for these important Pedi visits.

Mobile lab draws at AMC started yesterday and went well. We are fine tuning lab station placement today.

Athena telehealth continues to be going well with EHC & AMC starting today. GHC will be next.

Please be careful and....

- Please wash your hands (often),
- Don't touch your face,
- Maintain social/physical distancing (it works),
- Definitely wear a mask (it is not a political statement; it's a public health good),
- Continue to be in touch with and take care of each other, and help to educate everyone.

Be well,

Joel

Be patient; be mindful