

# VMG COVID-19 UPDATE

Friday, October 9,  
2020

Issue # 87



Good afternoon and thank you again for all your efforts this past week and in these highly unusual times.

Marta Tellado, President and CEO of Consumer's Union wrote recently about one of Aesop's Fables, The Boy Who Cried Wolf (the one where the boy convinces his neighbor that his sheep are being killed – so often that he is not believed). It's 2,600 years old and Tellado's point is that misinformation, and the chaos it creates, is as old as information itself. Only now, it's complicated and accelerated by social media and by the violation of multiple norms by many "in charge" resulting in all sorts of conspiracy theories and false assertions. This creates a dangerous situation, especially in the midst of a pandemic, when we need people to make choices on a daily basis to protect their health and the health of their neighbors.

So, some very basic facts (actual facts):

- The virus is in our populations; it did not go away
- There is no "cure" and no vaccine (yet)
- It spreads by droplets and also by aerosol (think of what smoke "looks like"), passed from person to person (this is why we stress wearing a mask or face covering over the mouth and nose; at least this reduces the droplets and some of the "smoke")
- So being in proximity to someone who is transmitting the virus is dangerous (that's why we stress social distancing; at least 6 feet and no crowds)
- People can spread the virus even before they themselves are symptomatic (so you may not know who has the virus which is why we stress, again, no crowds, wear a mask)
- Concentrations of the virus matter; so outdoors in open air is safer than indoors with poor air flow
- Although it is true that most cases are mild to moderate, we have seen, and are still seeing, large numbers of deaths and hospitalizations; it is not true that very few are affected (by the time you read this, the U.S. alone will have had 212,000 deaths) and we are seeing in excess of 40,000 new cases per day this past week
- It's not always easy to predict who will be most vulnerable; on average, elderly men with underlying conditions and people who cannot social distance and may have poor access to good housing, food, and medical care are two groups at high risk (and there are

many others). But we don't know what we don't know (it's only been with us since February-March) and other groups may also be at high risk

Our best defense so far is to wear masks, social/physical distance, meet virtually or outdoors (with masks and social distance), wash our hands a lot, and don't go out if sick. Yes, we have lost jobs and businesses and wearing a mask can be "a pain" but, as Tom Friedman said in the NYT a few days ago "it was never a choice between masks OR jobs but rather masks FOR jobs (the more we keep people healthy the faster our businesses get back to normal and jobs return). Wearing a mask is not a sign of weakness. Wearing a mask is a sign of strength, being in touch with reality, and civic duty as those who wear them are doing what they can to protect others.

One other thing. Don't listen to junk science or self-serving propaganda from people who don't know science and don't deal in facts. This is telling: *Scientific American* endorsed a presidential candidate for the first time in 100+ years of publication and the *New England Journal of Medicine* did the same.

If you want a close look at facts and trends, the link to this infographic is informative (it's updated daily): <https://informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/covid-19-coronavirus-infographic-datapack/>



## COVID-19 #CoronaVirus Infographic Datapack Information is Beautiful

UPDATE 21st Apr: Reinstated our NEW trajectories chart. Now tracks daily deaths, active cases as well as total cases and total deaths. Great Omid Kashan. Inspired the excellent Financial Times team.: updated 'Teenaged 60+' graphic with new UK data: added new risk data by biography (men more likely to die) (): added new dataviz on DIY mask materials

informationisbeautiful.net

It also has a graphic presentation of activities rated by COVID risk.

### National and State

The Midwest and great plains states are seeing a steep rise in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. The Northeast which, as we know, was first hit the hardest and then seemed to contain the virus and reduce spread (mainly by social distancing and masking), may now be seeing an increase in cases. Some major cities including New York and Boston are now rolling back some reopening or halting plans for increased activity (including school attendance). New Jersey has begun to close parks and picnic areas trying to cut down on gatherings.

In Massachusetts a total of 167 cases among students and 92 among staff members have been reported since school reopening began (very likely an under-count as many cases were probably not reported). This is likely to increase as there is a lag between reported cases and opening of schools.

Why? Probably, the colder weather is forcing people indoors. Students are now back at many schools and colleges reopened. But it is probably also lowered vigilance and tolerance for the work of staying safe. In today's NYT, Danielle Ompad, an epidemiologist at NYU was quoted as saying "we're all kind of exhausted with it. We have to acknowledge that this is not easy."

## **At VMG**

We continue to do the work of providing needed services to patients while trying to keep them and our staff and practitioners as safe as possible.

We continue to monitor the positivity rates for the virus in our local areas and in the tests we do at VMG. For last week, no test done at VMG was positive. We are not seeing large increases in our immediate communities (except for some increase in the town of Amherst reported in college students living off campus).

Gina shared the latest version of our safety guidelines earlier this week. Please make sure to follow these practices and politely remind others when you see lapses; it's good for them and for all of us.

As the weather gets colder (and stormier), a lot of work is going on to prepare to bring a higher proportion of care indoors, in as safe a way as possible.

More flu vaccine is arriving and we've begun and are continuing to plan for more patients getting vaccinated. And, as a reminder, all staff and practitioners are required to be vaccinated against flu this year (unless you meet exclusion criteria). We don't yet have the plan for staff vaccination yet; soon.

Thanks again to the Facilities Team and all the "outdoor workers" as the recent storms came through forcing us to improvise and respond.

We'll be sending our next communication to patients by the end of next week. We'll send you a copy also. Here are some of the things we're planning to let them know:

- VMG is following the state's mandatory safety standards including providing healthcare as much as possible by virtual means (video with audio preferable)
- When you come to a VMG Health Center, please arrive ten minutes early. Screening will take place at the entrance (including temperature check, screening questions, hand hygiene, social distancing, and masks for all over 2 years of age)
- Patients will be asked to wait in their vehicle if they arrive early. We'll explain that, for patients with cars, this is the safest waiting area
- Patients will be asked to bring their cell phone (if they have one). We'll use their cell as the way to contact them when it's time to enter for their services
- Patients will be told that, when in the health center for an appointment, measures will be taken to continue to protect them. We will be careful to limit time in exam rooms and we'll use available technology (iPad or other devices or cell phone to complete part of the visit
- VMG has a separate and distinct section for all patients who are being seen for illness in Greenfield, Northampton and Amherst

- Testing for symptoms of flu, strep throat, COVID-19, will be completed as self-testing, outside, guided by a VMG staff member
- We will be stressing the importance of flu vaccination for all patients
- We'll be reminding patients to try to be in quiet, private spaces during virtual visits.

OK, that's all for now. Get outdoors this weekend, listen to some good music, read, see friends and family safely and have a good weekend.

Please stay safe and well. Please continue to do what works:

- Please wash your hands (often),
- Don't touch your face,
- Maintain social/physical distancing (it works), and avoid large gatherings and crowds
- Definitely wear a mask (it is not a political statement; it's a public health good), (and for those patients and others who wear their masks without covering their mouth and nose, help them understand that both are necessary)
- Don't come to work if you feel sick,
- Continue to be in touch with and take care of each other, and help to educate everyone.

Have a great weekend.

Joel

Be patient; be mindful