



Prevention & Medical Care
To Help You Live Better, Longer.



The Eggplant

Valley Medical Group, P.C. Staff Newsletter

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By now, you are all aware of the coronavirus pandemic (according to the World Health Organization, a pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease and COVID-19 is now classified as a pandemic illness). Information about the impact of the virus and the disease caused by the virus (COVID-19) is changing daily. While the local impact is not yet severe, we do need to prepare as best we can for the likely spread of the illness and its effects. Here's what we are doing at this time to keep patients, staff, and our communities as safe as possible.

1. We are closely monitoring the world-wide and local COVID-19 situation. We are following the guidance and recommendations of the CDC and the Massachusetts DPH as well as local public health authorities and we are staying in close touch with our local hospital systems to coordinate care and share ideas and expertise.
2. We have established an "Incident Command Structure" to better organize and coordinate our information flow and prevention and mitigation activities led by Gina Campbell, VMG Incident Commander and our VP for Clinical Operations. All decisions, actions, and communications at VMG related to the pandemic will be coordinated through this structure. The Incident Command Team and Leadership are meeting daily to monitor the changing information and situation and take appropriate actions.

NOTE: (You may not be familiar with the term "incident command." It's a term used in healthcare and other industries to designate a structure and communication process to deal with unusual crises. We have used a structure like this before, most recently with the Halloween ice storm of 2011).

3. In order to help slow the spread of the virus, we are notifying patients with symptoms of COVID-19 as identified by the CDC (fever, cough, shortness of breath, flu-like symptoms) NOT to come to the health center. Rather, we're asking them to call first to speak with triage.

- o Patients are being notified by portal via email blasts, VMG website, and message on hold. There will also be a message on the appointment scheduling page of the portal.

- o We are posting signs on our entrances asking patients who have symptoms NOT to enter the building but to call (number provided) for triage

4. In order to help slow the spread of the virus, we will be requiring staff who have symptoms of flu and/or COVID-19 to stay at home until their symptoms resolve. We'll have more information about sick leave and the use of PTO and "return to work" policies soon.

5. We are considering work from home policies and capabilities (for those whose jobs are suitable) in the event that we have to close or curtail our activities in the health centers.

6. We are reviewing and revising cleaning and disinfecting procedures at all of our sites and we are appropriately monitoring and providing supplies for cleaning and for personal protection, following the recommendations of the CDC.

7. In order to slow the spread of the virus we are identifying and changing appropriate in-person meetings to conference calls and/or cancelling/postponing meetings. We'll keep you informed if a meeting you were to attend is cancelled or postponed. For now, all scheduled Brown Bags are cancelled until further notice. (We'll arrange to round instead).

8. We will be providing appropriate education to staff and patients based on information from authoritative and trusted sources (mainly the CDC and Mass DPH) on a regular basis.

9. There is currently no test available locally for COVID-19. We have been told that testing will be available in about a two week time frame. We will announce when testing is available as well as the indications and procedures for testing.

10. There is currently no vaccine or specific treatment for COVID-19. The emphasis now is on stopping/slowing the spread of the virus. Practitioners and clinical staff will use clinical judgement as to recommending “stay at home” and supportive treatment and or referral to other more intensive facilities.

11. See the fact sheet links below for the best advice on preventive actions and managing symptomatic patients.

Information and recommendations about how to manage patients in this pandemic is changing on a daily basis. There is also a lot of misinformation being spread out of anxiety and people feeling they “need to do something.” We don’t want to contribute to fear and panic AND we also want to make sure that you and our patients are as accurately informed as possible. We will continue to provide healthcare to our patients and communities with appropriate modifications in processes and services as they become necessary. For right now, the only changes we are making are listed above. More will be coming and we will keep you informed. Please keep an ongoing list of questions raised by patients as well as staff. You will shortly get information on a VMG email address to send these questions for response by our Incident Command structure.

You will have many questions, as will our patients. We will be sending updates with key information as well as the best answers to questions that are raised on a regular basis.

Here is a link to a CDC factsheet about the virus and illness as well as actions to prevent infection and spread: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>

This link is appropriate to recommend to patients and as a basic source of information for our staff and practitioners.

Some practitioners are getting questions from patients about travel precautions. Here is a link to the CDC factsheet on travel: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/faqs.html#canceling-postponing-travel>

One last point: although this is a public health emergency on a population basis, not everyone will get sick and, of those who do get sick, not everyone will get severe illness. Try to stay informed and help patients stay informed. That's the best way to remain calm and cope, as necessary.

Thanks for your attention and service during this public health emergency.

Joel

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