

VMG COVID-19 UPDATE

Thursday, July 10, 2020

Issue # 73

OK. It's time to say it clearly. Too much is at stake. He's just wrong! The President says that the virus is 99% harmless. He says it will just disappear. He says that cases are going up because we are testing too much. He said the warm weather would kill the virus. He says he disagrees with the scientists. He's just wrong! And his being wrong is getting people sick and people may die as followers insist on NOT taking the only steps we have to control the virus.

He says that mask wearing is optional. Yet he wants people attending his rallies to sign a waiver giving up their rights to sue if they get sick. Some people not wearing masks at the rallies say it's about their freedom. They can waive their rights to sue if they wish. But when they leave the rallies and go home or to work or they're with a neighbor, did the people at home or work or in the neighborhood waive their rights? Because those are the people who are then at risk.

We're now seeing infections spike in Tulsa, the site of a rally 2-3 weeks ago. Few were wearing masks or social/physical distancing. We're seeing spikes, outbreaks really, and big ones, in states and cities that "opened up" quickly (following the White House advice but not the Public Health advice). Phoenix is in crisis. Arizona, Florida, California also on the brink. Puerto Rico is approaching another crisis with COVID-19 while still trying to recover from storms in 2017. An incoming class of recruits at Fort Benning, Georgia had to quarantine because of infection. Iowa cancelled summer schools because of infection. Professional sports (and college) teams are cancelling or delaying training camps and practices because of infection. This is still a widespread and serious pandemic in the U.S. And outside the U.S., the only countries who are doing relatively well are the ones who shut down early, stayed shutdown until they isolated and traced cases, and then opened only when infections were way down and opened slowly. Hot spots around the globe now include several South American countries, India, Hong Kong, and even parts of Australia.

And, as we've said, it's summertime and we're having tourists and visitors. And colleges are planning to reopen in the fall. And we're planning to reopen schools in the fall. Yes, some countries have reopened schools successfully so far. Germany has. But they drove their infection rates way down BEFORE reopening. And they were prepared with people and supplies to check students and staff. And they have leaders with clear and consistent messages and national plans. We are not prepared and we have no clear national plan or direction.

Atul Gawande said recently that one of the most important Public Health measures is communication: clear, consistent, instructive, from the top leaders on down. We don't have that in the U.S. now.

So without clear and unified leadership across the country and especially at the national level, It's up to us. We need to be vigilant and take on a public health role. Being vigilant means always wearing a mask when in public, social/physical distancing, hand hygiene, etc. And when

you have visitors, as difficult as it is, insisting that visitors take these measures as well. And you may have to ask folks to self-quarantine if they are coming from areas that are known to be hotspots.

In the movie *Crimson Tide*, at a point where an invalid order is given by an American nuclear submarine captain to launch nuclear weapons without confirmation of the need, the Executive Officer intervenes and tells his weapons officer (nicknamed “weps”), “it’s up to you weps.” “You’re the only one with the key to unlock the weapons. It’s up to you.” Well, we’re not unleashing nuclear weapons. But we do have to contradict the misinformation about this virus and give a clear public health message to family, friends, neighbors, patients, colleagues, and communities. You know the message:

- The virus is here; it’s not going away
- We have no vaccine and no reliable and readily available treatments
- It is potentially deadly; it is not 99% harmless
- You can transmit it even when you don’t have symptoms
- Wearing a mask will help to stop you from unknowingly infecting someone else (and if they wear a mask, they can protect you also)
- Social/physical distancing decreases the odds of transmission
- Outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor (with physical distancing and wearing masks)

Should you “fire” friends and family? No, but please help to educate them. Please consider yourselves “healthcare ambassadors.”

State and Regional

Massachusetts is doing relatively well now and western Massachusetts especially well now. That could change with visiting this summer.

Massachusetts is continuing with a slower than most reopening plan. The Governor currently plans to allow schools to reopen in the fall (or maybe later this summer). There is some disagreement about classroom limits and social/physical distancing requirements (the state says 3 feet is enough; the CDC says 6 feet). There are some concerns about whether schools should reopen at all. Data on infection rates and the ability to supply and staff schools will likely determine this question.

Here’s a quote from an article in *the New York Times*:

“The good news is that the experience in other countries suggests that it may be possible to reopen schools. Germany, Denmark and others have done so [without causing big new virus outbreaks](#), as President Trump noted yesterday.

But those other countries have taken two steps that the U.S. has not.

One, they have first reduced the overall rate of new infections to low levels: Germany reported 35 new cases per million residents over the past week; the U.S. had almost 1,100. ([The Times updates this map every day](#), tracking the virus around the world.)

Two, some of those other countries have allocated new money for schools, as I heard after surveying some of my Times colleagues around the world.”

The “new money” was for extra staffing and supplies to check for fevers and symptoms multiple times per day, etc.

As far as we know, there are no plans for that here (yet); but it may be necessary.

One consequence of school reopening in this atmosphere of uncertainty as well as the arrival of cold and flu season will be a lot of anxiety (parents and kids) that we, as healthcare workers, will have to understand and respond to.

At VMG

Please make sure to review the email Gina just sent on the management of patients within the health centers.

You’re seeing reminders sent by the Health Center Managers about wearing masks in the health centers. Please be sure to observe this policy. It’s a part of our best defense against the virus and in line with our goal about providing the best care while keeping patients, *staff and practitioners* as safe as possible.

News from Gina on Operations:

- ASPC doing well: now on 30 minute scheduling. Outreach is being done for routine and higher risk colonoscopy
- Radiology – available for mammograms: routine screening, along with high risk.
- The outdoor lab facilities are doing well
- Tents up and running at all 4 sites. Expanding care carefully and thoughtfully.
- Health Center Managers and Reception Coordinators reviewed in-house visit scheduling
- BP clinics are being arranged.
- Plans for the move of Eye Care from NHC to EHC are underway.
- We are having difficulty ordering “purple” and “green” top wipes. Please use the “white tops” and observe the instructions on “dwell time.”

News from Greg:

Hall Drive at AMC will be paved. Work will start early August. And, when complete, paving will begin at NHC. This should allow enough time to complete these projects while our in person volume is lowest and before winter storms.

News from Steve:

- As a Group we want to avoid putting up barriers to COVID testing. Please review testing guidelines Gina has made available.
- There is a lot of Lyme disease showing up. We will need to keep index of suspicion up for Lyme

And News from Martha:

- The alpha and beta test of athena telehealth is now complete. Go live for the full product is scheduled for July 20th. Training for standard workflow of telehealth/calls to take place prior
- There has been erroneous language emailed or texted to patients re: appointments. Patients are being confused because the language suggests these reminders are for in person appointments. We may need to discontinue these reminders until this is resolved.
- athena will change the way names of providers are displayed (finally). The full name of provider and degree will now be seen instead of just initials. This will be helpful with cross-center scheduling.

Have a great weekend and let's all stay safe, connected and remember,

- 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. Help others to stay safe and be well.

Joel

Be patient; be mindful

Oh, and watch this.....thanks to Claudia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uL52AuF4QzY>