It’s been a few months since my last email to everyone, so we are long overdue. As you all know, California has had a surge of COVID-19 cases in the last few weeks. Although at the time of my last email, we hadn’t had any of my patients that tested positive for the virus, by now, we have had over a dozen. Everyone has had mild symptoms so far, and no one has had to be hospitalized, not even older patients with several co-morbidities. There are several things I need to go over with all of you.

THINGS TO KNOW

* In the last 14 days, if you have had an unexplained cough, fever, sore throat, or have been around someone who is diagnosed or suspected positive for COVID-19, please do not come into the office. Instead, call us first to discuss your situation. They are checking temperatures upon entering the building, and you will not be able to enter if you have a fever.
* Masks that have a **valve on the outside** will filter the air going to you, but it does **not** filter air coming out. Therefore, you will not be able to come into the office if you are wearing such a mask.
* Because we are trying to limit the number of people in the office, please DO NOT STOP BY unannounced in the office. Even if you are already in the building and have a question for us, please just call us instead.
* We are planning to start influenza vaccines in the beginning of October. I don’t recommend getting it too much earlier because your antibodies may start declining before peak flu season hits in January/February in San Diego. I recommend the 4-strain flu vaccine for everyone, and the high-dose 4-strain flu vaccine for everyone ages 50 and over (NOT the “senior” flu vaccine). I will send out another email closer to the time.
* Remember to come to the office at least 5 minutes before your scheduled appointment time so you can be checked in. If you are coming for a physical exam, come 15 minutes early so we can do everything that’s needed for your physical.

VIRTUAL VISITS

We are seeing patients in the office and are still doing complete physical exams. However, we are also doing virtual visits for those who prefer not to come in, but we are changing platforms for our telemedicine visits. Instead of using a third party application, our electronic medical record Athena now has a built-in system. When you make a telemedicine visit, we will send you a link through email or text. Before your appointment, please click the link to see if your phone requires that you give the program permission to use your camera and microphone. This program may not work on old iPads or phones, so if you’re in doubt, you can call the office to set up a trial run of it. When it’s time for your appointment, just click on the link, and it will open up your camera to have a virtual visit. Please be patient at the virtual appointment because we do need to finish up with previous patients before we can log on to your visit, but if it has been more than 10 minutes past your appointment, feel free to call the office and check in with us.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM COVID-19

Many people have been asking what is currently safe to do and what is not. It is true that to be 100% safe, you can stay in your house and never leave, but I do not think that’s advisable for anyone. How much you do is definitely affected by your risk tolerance and the situation you are going to be in. Even though I don’t recommend going to crowded beaches during the holidays, the chances of getting infected while you are there is low because people are generally at least 6 feet apart, and there is a lot of air movement. And even though you should bring a mask every time you leave your house, I don’t think it’s necessary to have it on if you are going for a walk by yourself or with someone in your household, as long as you are not going to be close to anyone else. At this point in time, we feel that a significant exposure involves being within 6 feet of someone in an indoor environment for at least 15 minutes. This is reflected in the fact that the majority of outbreaks we are seeing occur in enclosed environments, often among family members. This is where I think people should be the most careful. Having been in lockdown for so many months, people are starting to get together with their families or friends, and these occasions are often times in close proximity indoors for extended periods of time. If you do want to get together with family or friends, do it outside with everyone 6 feet apart and wearing masks. I really like this scientific post from a couple of months ago that really helps you better understand the risks in various situations – <https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them>.

TESTING FOR COVID

Regarding testing for the virus, it is currently much more difficult to get testing due to the surge of patients in the last few weeks. There is a shortage of the testing material, so there are now restrictions on who can be tested. Testing for the presence of the virus by doing a nasal or oral swab through Scripps (888-261-8431) or through San Diego County (211 or booked online) is now only performed on patients who have significant symptoms suggestive of possible COVID-19. If you have been exposed to someone who you later found out is positive for the virus and you currently do not have symptoms or only have mild symptoms, they are recommending that you self-isolate for 14 days and NOT be tested. Part of the reason is because we are low on testing supplies nationwide, but also because there is currently no proven treatment for people with mild symptoms, so even if you were to test positive, you would just self isolate for the 14 days. You can always call the Scripps COVID testing line to see if supplies are more available, and you are able to be tested. You can also look to see if there are private clinics near you that might be able to offer the testing. Antibody testing is still available by blood, but it can take a few weeks to develop antibodies, so it is NOT an appropriate test to find out if you currently have the virus. If you are interested in the antibody test, you can consider donating blood at the San Diego blood bank. When you donate, they will automatically run the antibody test for you, and they will also tell your blood type. Many people have been asking about their blood types because some studies show that certain blood types slightly increase your risk of getting the virus and other blood types slightly decrease your risk. I have not been encouraging checking for your blood type because the differences are minor, and there is nothing you can do to change your blood type. Knowing your results should not change your behavior in any way.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU TEST POSITIVE

Given the surge in cases over the last few weeks, many people have been asking what to do if they end up testing positive for the COVID-19 virus. If you have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, you should simply stay home and self-isolate from everyone else. Here is a link of guidelines from the CDC about how you should take care of yourself – <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>. If you do have some slight shortness of breath, we can get you an albuterol inhaler which can help open up your airways. If you have significant symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath, or severe fatigue, you should go to urgent care or the emergency room for evaluation. Because this is still such a new virus that we don’t know enough about, there is constant ongoing research. If you test positive for the virus and have no or mild symptoms, and you are interested in helping in this research, please call or text Dr. Shane Crotty at the La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology ([https://www.lji.org](https://www.lji.org/)) at 858-215-1422. They are looking for patients who currently have the infection but are not hospitalized. This is a link to a recent talk he gave about the not-for-profit research they’ve been doing right in our neighborhood to help develop a vaccine: <https://youtu.be/29aAxkvesWc>.

In the meantime, please continue to wash your hands, avoid touching your face, wear a mask when you’re out in public near other people, and stay 6 feet apart from others. We will all get through this together!

Wynnshang Sun, MD