As you all know, California and the United States are spiking to all-time high levels of COVID-19 cases and deaths, and we are now in another stay-at-home order until the end of December. Here in San Diego, we have dropped below the threshold of 15% availability of ICU beds, meaning that more and more sick people are flooding the hospital. Indeed, at Scripps La Jolla, we had about 14 COVID-19 positive patients in the hospital just one month ago, and now we are above 60. Everyone is tired of living in this “new normal,” but now is not the time to let down your guard. You need to wash your hands frequently, avoid touching your face, stay socially distant from other people, and continue to wear masks when you are around people that do not live in your household. In the beginning, we were concerned about the virus spreading among large groups of people, but what we have been seeing recently with our patients is that many COVID-19 cases are spread by small gatherings of friends and family. Friends and family are who you trust the most, but because the virus can be spread before people become symptomatic, these small gatherings are often the vehicle of spread now. If you are together with friends or family that do not live in your household, everyone should still wear masks, try to hold gatherings outside, and remain 6 feet apart.

If you are exposed or potentially exposed to someone with COVID, you should self-quarantine for 14 days to see if you develop symptoms. EVEN if you test negative during that time, you should still self-quarantine for 14 days because it may take you 2 weeks to test positive. If you do test positive, don’t rely on the county to do contact tracing – you should contact everyone you have had close contact with (defined as within 6 feet of someone for at least 15 min total) in the previous 14 days and let them know that they should self-isolate and get tested.

With regards to testing, here are some options as we do not do COVID-19 testing in the office:

* Scripps COVID line (888-261-8431): covered by insurance, mostly for high risk patients with symptoms or any patients with severe symptoms
* Perlman Clinic (858-554-1212): covered by insurance, requires a virtual visit to see if you qualify, then schedule a drive-up test
* Healthtopia (760-230-1888): rapid COVID-19 test, pay out of pocket $85-200 depending on type of test requested
* USSpecialtyLabs.com or COVIDClinic.com: book online, several different tests, including ones for travel, pay out of pocket $85-200 depending on type of test requested

With regards to the COVID-19 vaccines, we have been receiving many calls from our patients about how they can receive the vaccine. At this point in time, we are still attending meetings and awaiting confirmation about how the vaccine will be distributed and administered, but currently, it does not look like we will be distributing the vaccine directly from our office in the near future. Once the FDA gives emergency use authorization, the first set of vaccines will be given to individuals that work in hospitals and nursing facilities, as well as residents of nursing facilities. As soon as we find out more information about how and when subsequent doses will be distributed, we will let you know. We are NOT keeping any type of waiting list for the vaccine at the office. We understand that there is a lot of angst and anxiety about the situation, but we currently do not have any more information. As soon as we know more about a plan for vaccine distribution, we will send out another email, so stay tuned.

In the meantime, continue to do everything you can to stay safe.