How do closing schools and public events affect the spread of COVID-19?

An informative article brought to you by Coffee Regional Medical Center

With the closures of schools and universities, national and local sporting events, church services, and other large social gatherings, it is difficult to relax and push aside worry and angst. Our nation and our world are experiencing something new, and this unknown, for many, is very concerning. As your healthcare provider, Coffee Regional Medical Center would like to offer some information that we hope will set your mind at ease and educate our community on why these closures and cancellations are taking place and why they are so important.

The novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a virus that our immune systems have not been exposed to; therefore, we have no antibodies to fight the virus. If we have antibodies from previous exposure, then our bodies can rapidly ramp up the production of those antibodies if that same virus infects us at a later date. Because no one has antibodies for COVID-19, everyone is at risk for catching the virus, becoming ill, and spreading the virus. Also, there has not been time to develop a vaccine, like the "flu shot," to help our bodies build those antibodies to fight off this virus. That could take up to 18 months. We have all been exposed to flu viruses and, even if we haven't had a seasonal "flu shot," most of us have some antibodies to fight a flu virus. For the majority of Americans, COVID-19 presents a low risk. Many will show no signs or symptoms, and others will have a fever and mild respiratory symptoms, such as a dry cough, that will be controlled at home with over-the-counter medications. There is, however, an essential piece of our population who are at risk for having serious side-effects from COVID-19. Using the information that has been gathered on those already affected around the world, those aged 65 and above and those with compromised immune systems are at the highest risk for developing life-threatening side effects that must be treated inside a hospital or healthcare facility.

If this virus is allowed to spread, without intervention, the at-risk population becoming ill, all at the same time, becomes the threat. There simply are not enough medical resources to handle a large amount of the community falling ill and needing medical intervention at the same time. Everyone deserves quality healthcare and medical intervention when needed. If the virus is not slowed, our medical system (no medical system) would be able to handle such an influx of patients.

By closing schools, postponing events and social gatherings, and subsequently encouraging people to remain at home away from public areas, we are minimizing opportunities where the virus could spread. In doing this, it can only bring a positive effect on the current situation. Isolating ourselves from these large public gatherings and events to slow the spread of COVID-19 is something most of us can do and should do. We all have a very important role in the success of slowing the virus. Ensuring your family limits their exposure to the public and remains conscientious of not having close contact with others is one way we can all make a difference right now. In addition, thoroughly washing hands, and using hand sanitizer, when you do have to be in public places, will also be very important.

Children who contract the virus may not have obvious signs and symptoms; however, they can and will spread the virus just as easily. This virus has proven itself to be fast-spreading. A school environment, with full classrooms and hundreds of children interacting daily, makes a
particularly dangerous place to spread the virus. Even though your family may not be "at risk," and these closings may be inconvenient, please know that other children may live with grandparents, or be cared for by someone with a compromised immune system. Therefore mass action, like closing all schools for a designated period, is necessary. We must come together as a community and nation, to slow and stop the spread of this virus. All of our citizens have the right to receive quality care, and they deserve for their families, their neighbors, and their fellow citizens to take necessary steps to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

If you suspect that you or a loved one has been exposed to coronavirus, and you are showing correlating symptoms of COVID-19, please take these measures. Unless you are experiencing a health emergency and need immediate health intervention, do not go to an emergency room. **Call** your primary care physician's office to discuss your symptoms and your possible exposure. Your healthcare provider will determine if you need to be tested for COVID-19. It has been stressed to **CALL** your healthcare provider to discuss your symptoms and set up testing, should they determine testing is necessary. This is to limit the exposure to others should you indeed test positive for COVID-19. There is an approximate 48-72 hours turnaround time on this test. Therefore it is essential for the individual to self-quarantine until test results are returned.

Be prepared to treat the common symptoms of COVID-19, which includes fever, cough, and possible respiratory congestion. Be sure to remain hydrated, drinking plenty of liquids. Sports drinks such as Gatorade and Powerade contain electrolytes that are effective in combating dehydration. It is important to emphasize that **if you are experiencing shortness of breath or respiratory distress, please report to the nearest Emergency room or call 911.** Be sure to make all those who come into contact with you aware of your suspected condition so they can take precautions against contracting the possible COVID-19.

Testing sights are being expanded throughout the U.S., as noted by President Trump in a recent address to the nation, so please stay tuned for more information on that.