St. Mary's COVID-19 update for March 24, 2020
New restrictions on visitors, food deliveries announced; shelter-in-place vital for safety

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

As the COVID-19 outbreak continues to spread in our communities, St. Mary's remains committed to implementing the latest state and national guidelines to protect patients, colleagues and the community, including tighter visitation and delivery policies.

Here are key updates:

To protect our patients, colleagues and providers, St. Mary's has further restricted visitation at all three of our hospitals. No visitors are allowed except in certain circumstances, such as if the patient is receiving end-of-life care, delivering a baby, is a child in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, or has special needs. Visitors must be at least 18 years of age and will be screened for signs of illness at entry.

In an effort to minimize outside visitors and products coming into our facility, we must respectfully decline unsolicited deliveries of food, flowers, and gifts at this time. However, we are very appreciative of the outpouring of support from people and business for our staff during these difficult times.

Safety is a Core Value for Trinity Health and St. Mary's, and we are deeply committed to providing the appropriate level of personal protective equipment (PPE) for all of our colleagues. We continue to work daily with suppliers worldwide and with government agencies to secure additional PPE. To be good stewards of our resources, we purposefully ordered reusable PPE, including shields and gowns, to avoid some of the supply issues being faced across our country and the world. We use PPE according to CDC guidelines.

While we cannot accept donations of food and gifts at this time, donations of funds and certain products, such as new and unused PPE, are much needed. St. Mary's Foundation welcomes your donations. Please contact our Foundation at Foundation@stmarysathens.org.

St. Mary's Gift Shop remains open to colleagues and approved visitors. In addition, the Gift Shop can accept telephone orders for flower deliveries to patients or staff. Please call 706.389.2548 for details. The gift shops at St. Mary's Sacred Heart and Good Samaritan Hospitals are closed.

To protect the health and safety of our volunteers, many of whom are at elevated risk from COVID-19, St. Mary's has suspended all volunteer services until further notice.

In conjunction with our medical staff and in accordance with guidance from the CDC and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, we are postponing non-essential surgeries and certain radiology procedures. However, we continue to schedule and perform essential procedures
when a delay would harm the patient, for example, if a patient needs immediate surgery for cancer.

Because severe COVID-19 infections attack and damage the lungs, St. Mary’s is joining with all of Trinity Health in urging people who smoke or vape to quit. Smoking and vaping are known to damage delicate tissues in the lungs and bronchial system and can be especially dangerous for pregnant women. This damage can put people who smoke and vape at heightened risk for serious complications, including pneumonia. For information, please call our certified Freedom from Smoking facilitator, Todd Drake, at 706.389.2915.

To protect our vulnerable patients, we have temporarily suspended our Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation classes at St. Mary’s Hospital. All support groups and perinatal classes are also suspended through at least April 30, and our Wellness Centers in Athens and Lavonia are temporarily closed and staff have been redeployed. The cafeterias at our hospitals remain open for colleagues and approved visitors, but are closed to the general public until further notice.

We continue to urge everyone to follow CDC guidelines and take precautions to protect themselves and their families:

- Wash your hands often.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Don’t shake hands or hug when greeting others.
- Keep social distance of six feet or more.
- Shelter in place except for essential trips (work, grocery shopping, visiting the doctor) or exercise.
- If sick, stay home except to receive medical care.

These measures are essential for slowing the spread of COVID-19 and reducing the risk of surges that might exceed the capacity of the health care system.

For about 80 percent of people, COVID-19 infections are mild to moderate. For these people, treatment is the same whether the patient is tested or not: rest, drink plenty of fluids, and self-isolate. However, for about 20 percent of people, COVID-19 can cause serious illness, including dangerously high fever, difficulty breathing, or death. Anyone with serious symptoms should seek emergency care immediately and call ahead so that staff can be prepared to receive you safely.

We realize these measures are painful but they are essential to protecting the health and safety of our patients, colleagues, providers and community. Thank you for following state and local measures to slow the spread of COVID-19. We are monitoring guidance continually and implementing new measures as they are recommended. We appreciate the support of everyone in the communities we serve.

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