

Behave safely as state reopens or you'll end up in our hospitals

Opinion: Our hospitals adjusted successfully to ensure capacity. But we could see a spike in hospitalizations in a month or two if safe behaviors aren't practiced.

Michael White, Opinion contributor

Although Arizona's stay-at-home order has expired, COVID-19 has not changed: It is highly infectious and has a potential for serious adverse effects.

We believe it's even more important now for Arizona residents to monitor themselves and choose to practice safe behaviors that have the potential to prevent a surge in COVID-19 infections in our state.

While our respective hospital systems have made the necessary adjustments to ensure we have capacity today to deal with the outbreak, as more residents return to their normal lives, we could see a spike in hospitalizations in a month or two if safe behaviors aren't practiced.

Will you act to protect yourself and others?

The good news is that Arizona has dramatically ramped up testing and many county health departments are developing strong contact tracing programs. Hospitals and health care professionals have learned much about the virus and are better prepared to treat those infected.

That said, even under the most thoughtful and gradual reopening plans, the real key to a safe recovery are the decisions you will make in the weeks ahead to continue to protect yourself and your loved ones.

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Many salons and restaurants have already reopened with safe distancing precautions in place, and other businesses are following. The question is, will you try to return to "life as usual" absent safe practices or will you take steps to protect yourself and others from the spread of COVID-19?

5 basic precautions you need to take

As collaborating patient care leaders of the region's major health systems that have experienced the challenges and heartbreak of caring for thousands of sick and dying COVID-19 patients, we can't urge you enough to continue practicing safe behaviors that have been proven to help prevent the spread of the virus. If you leave home, here are some precautions and actions you can take that are effective:

- Do not leave your home if you are ill except to receive medical care.
- Wear a mask when you're in public near others.
- Stay six feet away from others.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Wipe down surfaces that may be infected.

Of course, it may be very tempting for some or many to go back to the "good old days" before COVID-19. Keep in mind, though, the risks of the pandemic have not disappeared. The best advice for now is to err on the side of caution – if you choose to go out, be informed about the risks and take the appropriate measures to protect yourself, your loved ones and those around you.

We would also like to remind everyone to please seek care when you need it. Our community should be reassured that Arizona hospitals and emergency departments are safe places. Emergency departments are open, and one should not be afraid to seek help because of the pandemic. Delays in care can have a significant detrimental effect on your well-being.

By working together, we can reduce the number of infections and deaths and keep our hospitals in a constant state of readiness to care for patients during the next phase of the pandemic.

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