

March, 18, 2020



Dear Parents,

As novel coronavirus cases are being reported in Alaska, the Covid-19 pandemic is challenging all of us to help each other in new ways. Our office is open and we want to provide resources for you and your children.

As of this writing:

WE ARE OPEN OUR USUAL HOURS.

—We are seeing well care checkups and physicals on specified mornings now, with spaces in between the patients (no sick patients here at those times).

—We have always been compulsive about room/surface cleaning, and have taken those precautions to the next level.

—Sick calls are being seen in separate office sessions, with spaces in between the appointments.

WE ARE NOT SENDING CHILDREN DIRECTLY TO THE DRIVE-THROUGH CORONAVIRUS TEST SITE.

—This is because right now, the most common infections in kids are still influenza and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). We have tests for both. If your child tests negative for both, we may send further testing. As you have probably heard, we are experiencing shortages of swabs to do the novel coronavirus tests, not to mention shortages of the test kits themselves, so we're trying to rule out other diseases first.

IF YOUR CHILD IS SICK WITH COUGH, FEVER OR SHORTNESS OF BREATH, CALL US FIRST, DAY OR NIGHT.

—Save 911 calls for the true emergencies.





—We have a nighttime nurse triage line (same as our office number: 907-274-0274) and there is no charge for the call. Do not go directly to the emergency room or to urgent care.

—Most children (we believe >90%) do just fine with this virus. It may look like a mild cold or like influenza. Hardly ever do children need ER or hospital services. The nurses here during the day or on the triage line at night will talk you through what to do.

—Do not call the telemedicine doctor services. They have been shown to be more likely to call in medications which are not useful in this situation.

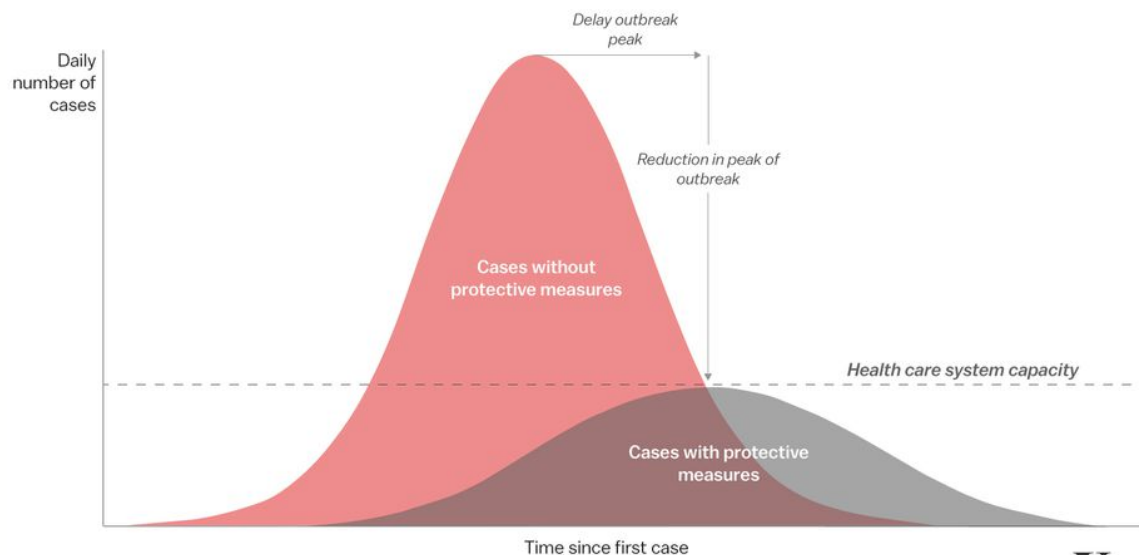
STAY HOME.

—Please help us protect the elders who DO often get very ill from this virus. Slow down the spread by not interacting with others. Coronavirus spreads through droplets that are sneezed or coughed. It can live on surfaces for awhile: hours to days. You know what to do: wash your hands often with soap and water (better than hand sanitizer), for 20 seconds, long enough to sing the “Happy Birthday” song or the ABC song twice (or another song of your choice!). Cough into your sleeve or a tissue. Don’t touch your face (I know, kids can’t manage that). But best of all, stay home. Because kids really aren’t good at any of those infection control measures.

—We are trying to “flatten the curve” (see attached graph). Because this is a novel (new) virus, no one is immune. We don’t have a vaccine and won’t until 2021. Most of us will catch this and most of us will be fine. But a higher percentage of elders will need hospitalization and ventilator support. These resources are limited in Alaska. We are trying to not have everybody get sick at once. If a smaller number get sick at a time, we will have enough hospital beds. But if everyone is sick at once, we won’t. As in the example at the recent press conference: the fire department can fight 800 fires a year, but not all on one day.



Flattening the curve



Source: CDC

Vox

HOW TO HELP YOUR KIDS UNDERSTAND:

— Kids will follow your lead. Try to act calm. See the enclosed page on how to talk to children of different ages. The big print material is: this is temporary. The vast majority of people will get the virus, not be too sick, and recover. Once we have the vaccine, the threat will diminish significantly.

— Explain for children that whenever something stressful happens, we can (as Mister Rogers' mother told him) always depend on helpers to get through it. We can all be helpers by slowing down the virus. Doctors and nurses, public health officials, cleaning crews, people who make masks and swabs, are all doing their utmost to help us.

LIMIT SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONICS.

— We learned this after 9/11: if you watch hour after hour of terrible news, it is traumatizing to you. Limit time on tablets and phones, and turn off the electronics 2 hours before bedtime.





– Try to keep a regular schedule. Eat nutritious food. Get outside, hike, go sledding.

FAMILY TIME:

– We always complain that we don't get enough time with our children. Resolve to make some good memories for your children during this difficult time. Sing, color, play board games, make Lego creations, read stories, and listen to music that is positive and inspirational. Kids may want to keep a journal with words and pictures of what's happening each day. Teens might interview elders to learn about other hard times, and how people came together to make things better.

-Face-to-face chats online with family and friends will help us feel less isolated.

GET GOOD INFORMATION:

– WE'LL BE POSTING UPDATES about Covid-19 and any changes in office procedures on our website anchoragepeds.com, and on our Facebook page. I will also be posting some links to sites about home activities with children.

Trusted resources:

Centers for Disease Control ... cdc.gov

World Health Organization... who.int

Alaska Information ... dhss.alaska.gov

Pediatrician-created website for parents...healthychildren.org

We Alaskans are resilient. We will get through this. We hope you and yours stay healthy: physically, mentally, and emotionally. Cindy, Karen, Kim and Kerry join me in saying: we are here for you. Call us with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mary Ann Jacob

