**March 22-Coronavirus OFFICE policy Update**

Information about Coronavirus and COVID19 is coming at unprecedented speed. As of Saturday there were 137 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Minnesota, over 25,000 in the US and more than 300,000 Worldwide. Many of the newly reported cases in Minnesota are from people without known travel or COVID19 exposure. In addition, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) last week reported a large uptick in Influenza-like illnesses (not tested for flu), at a time when Influenza should be on the decline. These are probably cases of undiagnosed COVID19. This means the number of people infected with COVID19 is much larger than have been confirmed by testing for the virus. We also know that patients with COVID19 (especially children) are most contagious and can transmit the disease a couple of days before they show any signs or symptoms of the disease. This is why this virus has spread so quickly because patients are transmitting disease before they feel sick enough to isolate themselves. The implications of this in areas where COVID19 is known to exist is that ANY person could be potentially capable of spreading disease, even if they do not feel ill. To protect yourself and family, especially adults over 50-60 please practice extreme social distancing. If possible, have your children avoid contact (other than Facetime) with grandparents. You and your family may (and should) go outside for walks or exercise but do not meet up with other families and keep at least 6 feet distance between you and others while outside. Cover your cough, wash your hands often for at least 20 seconds with soap and water.

In order to protect or patients, their families and our staff, effective immediately the following office visit policies will be in effect until further notice:

1. **ALL** ill patients who wish to schedule an appointment will be offered a Telemedicine visit with a provider. If the provider deems an office visit will be needed you will be able to schedule an afternoon appointment. **NO WALK-IN** visits will be available at this time.
2. **ALL** non-urgent appointments for Well Child Care visits, wart treatment, ear rechecks, asthma rechecks, nurse visits for vaccines and labs, etc. will be postponed for the time being. But some can be done by Telemedicine visit.
3. **Only Well Child Care (WCC)** visits for children 18 months or less who need critical immunizations will be scheduled in the morning with other patients who are not ill. The American Academy of Pediatrics and Children’s Hospital of Minnesota Infectious Disease experts advise us to keep up with immunizations for infants and toddlers to avoid risks of other preventable diseases that could reoccur if we avoid immunizing. If you have a child who is due for newborn through 18 month WCC visit please call the office to schedule a morning appointment. As the COVID19 situation evolves, we will update you when we believe it is safe to be seeing older children for Well Child Care visits in the office.
4. **Pre-Op exams** may not be necessary as most hospitals and surgery centers are postponing elective surgeries.

Good news: coronavirus usually causes mild illness in most people but especially in children.  The most common symptoms are fever and cough but also could have runny nose, body aches, sore throat, vomiting and diarrhea.  Many children have no symptoms at all.   Like all viruses, there is no treatment that our clinic (or emergency rooms/urgent care clinics) can provide to speed the healing process. If you or your child have any of the above symptoms even if you think your child may have coronavirus, you probably WILL NOT need to visit our clinic, but may call to schedule a Telemedicine visit. Most people who are sick **do not** need to be tested. There is no specific medicine to treat COVID19, so whether you test positive or negative, management of your illness will be the same. Also, individuals who **are not sick** should **not**be tested even if they have been exposed to COVID19. In Minnesota, we are past the point where testing will help contain the epidemic, there are too many confirmed and unconfirmed cases circulating now. Testing when not needed or not helpful in the management uses up desperately needed supplies that the hospitals will need to combat those who are seriously ill in the hospital. Transmission of virus can occur up to 7 days after the start of illness so if you have been diagnosed with COVID19 or have any of the symptoms of COVID19 be sure to immediately isolate your child and yourself for at least 72 hours after resolution of symptoms including fever (without the use of fever reducing medication) and improvement in cough AND at least 1 week after the start of the symptoms. If you are exposed to anyone with COVID19 or anyone who has symptoms of COVID19 you should isolate yourself for 14 days which is the known incubation period of the virus.

Primary reasons your child will need a sick-visit appointment in the office are

* Any fever (>100.4F) in a baby under 60 days
* Respiratory distress, increased work of breathing, or cough that interferes with sleep or play
* Dehydration signs
* Fever above 100.4 rectal for more than 4-5 days

**Telemedicine Visits**

We are pleased to be able to provide Telemedicine to our families at a time when avoiding exposures is so important. We are able to obtain a good history, limited exam and provide you with a plan of treatment all while avoiding the exposure of coming in to the office. In some cases we will ask you to come in for a lab test such as Rapid Strep or a brief exam if we are concerned about an ear infection in younger children or pneumonia at any age. The inability to do a complete exam with Telemedicine is not ideal and we may need to temporarily deviate from our medication prescribing policies. However, in these challenging times we have to balance risks of treating with considerations for safety. Because Telemedicine visits allow us to provide most services that you would receive during an office visit, we will send a bill for our service to your insurance company and your insurance may apply co-payments. Please call our office at 952-922-4200 if you wish to schedule a Telemedicine visit.

If you have a scheduled Telemedicine visit, go to ps.doxy.me about 3-5 minutes before your scheduled time. You will be asked to select which provider you will be seeing from a drop-down list and then enter the **PATIENT’S NAME**, not parent’s name. Be patient if you don’t see your provider on the screen right away as they are probably doing another visit and will be with you within a few minutes of the appointed time. New telemedicine users may wish to go to the website early to do a “Pre-Call Test” (lower left corner of screen) to be sure your device and internet connection are adequate. To help with an efficient Telemedicine visit here are some tips:

* Use strong Wi-Fi or Ethernet connection, do not use cellular data connection on your cell phone because it is not fast enough.
* Newer generation cell phones (iPhone 11, even earlier models, etc.) have wonderful cameras and work better than laptop computers to be able to move the camera around to examine your child.
* Close Apps or programs you are not using (or restart computer)
* Google Chrome or Apple Safari browsers work best.
* Have a small penlight available to aid in exam (with most cellphones you are not able to use the camera and flashlight at the same time).
* For infants and toddlers with fever or respiratory symptoms have them undressed and wrapped in blanket so they are already comfortable and ready to be examined.
* Please Do Not schedule Telemedicine visits during your child’s naptime or when your child is not available to be with you during the visit.

**Before Your Next Office Visit**

If your child is ill and wish to make an appointment, please call the office to schedule a telemedicine visit.

If you are scheduled to see a provider in the clinic, follow the new clinic visit guidelines outlined below.

**At Your Next Office Visit**

* **DO NOT COME INTO THE OFFICE BEFORE 1:30PM IF YOUR CHILD, YOU OR ANYONE WITH YOU IS ILL IN ANY WAY**-Instead call the office for guidance on when to come in for your visit.
* **WE ARE NO LONGER ALLOWING PATIENTS TO COME IN FOR WALK-IN APPOINTMENTS OF ANY KIND OR WALK-IN STREP TESTS**- Please call office for a telemedicine visit if necessary, to determine the appropriate plan.
* We ask that only one parent/guardian accompany the child during the visit. If you have other children, it would be best to leave them with someone at home or have them stay with an adult in the car during the office visit. This will help us to prevent the spread of coronavirus.
* When you arrive at our office, **do not**come inside. Please park in the parking lot, stay in your car, and call our office to let us know you have arrived. 952-922-4200
* When you arrive and call, please tell us the patient’s name and date of birth. Also provide a current phone number so we can call/text you when we are ready to bring you into the patient rooms.
* Hopefully you will have received an email with any paperwork that you need to fill out a day prior to your visit. Please bring the completed forms with you to your appointment.
* Remove all extra clothing and leave unnecessary bags/toys/other belongings in the car.
* We will call/text you when we are ready to bring you to your room. At that time come into the office and one of our staff will greet you in the waiting room to bring you directly to your exam room.
* At the front door there will be a box of masks. If you or your child is ill, **STOP** and put one on your child and one on yourself. Please take only one mask for each ill person as a courtesy to other patients who will also be needing to use masks so that we do not run out of masks.
* If you have a copay, this will be collected by the staff person who brings you to your room.
* Your nurse and provider will visit you in the exam room. After your visit is over, if you need a follow up appointment please call to schedule a follow-up visit to avoid prolonged time in office and at the front desk.
* When you are finished, you and your child can walk directly out of the office back to your car.  Please do not stop at the front desk on your way out.

**As always, if you have questions or concerns, please call or send a message through our patient portal.**

**Our office hours are not changing; we will be here during all regularly scheduled clinic hours if you need to be seen in the office.   Our phones are still available via the answering service 24 hours a day at 952-922-4200.**

**We apologize for any inconvenience and appreciate your understanding and cooperation. These changes are designed to keep all of our patients, their families and our staff safe as we strive to provide you with the very best care!**

IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO NOTE:

* COVID-19 contagiousness is highest in very close contact- distances of more than 6 feet that are not prolonged do not carry a very high risk.
* The vast majority of people who get coronavirus will have mild symptoms - fever, dry cough, headache and fatigue- gone in a day or two. The treatment is supportive. This means fever reducers, pain control and lots of fluid and rest and some chicken soup.
* Look for shortness of breath and respiratory difficulty which should be reported immediately.
* Transmission can occur for up to 14 days after having the illness, stay quarantined for at least 2 weeks.
* Currently our ability to test for COVID-19 is extremely limited and we will have to choose carefully which patients we will be recommending testing. In most cases test results take 4-7 days to be available, so that does not help us much in deciding how to approach anyone with symptoms of the disease. Current Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) recommendations are that any patient with fever, cough or cold symptoms assume they may have COVID19 and to be quarantined at home for minimum of 14 days.
* Children should be kept away from elderly and immunocompromised people as much as possible for the time being as they may carry and spread it to our most vulnerable population.
* If your child has asthma and has inhalers- please have your inhalers on hand and start them when they are sick as you normally would.
* We advise against all unnecessary travel at this time. It has been generally advised by the MDH to avoid all non-essential travel. Keep in mind any travel may be significantly disrupted at any destination. Also, many are recommending a 14-day quarantine upon returning from high-risk areas. Look to reliable sources of information such as the CDC, WHO and MDH.
* If your child was "potentially" exposed to COVID19 or around someone who has been exposed it is probably wise to be cautious and quarantine your child for at least 14 days.
* Schools have closed and the MDH is recommending to keep kids away from each other which would include playdates, activities, malls, and playdates, etc. Please be very strict with your children about this recommendation. Otherwise it defeats the purpose of closing schools to limit transmission of the coronavirus.

**Pediatric Services have taken extra precautions to make sure you, your family and our staff stay safe during this time. Effective immediately**:

* Children and caregivers will be assessed for COVID-19 risk via phone or via telemedicine visit prior to being allowed into the office for a visit. If deemed to be at risk, patients will not be allowed into the office.
* If you call and your child has a cough and fever or other COVID19 symptoms, you will be offered a scheduled time for a video telemedicine appointment that will be charged to your insurance company if you do not require an office visit.
* Please be aware COVID19 testing is not readily available in our clinic due to short supply of all testing swabs and reagents which is an issue nationwide. Contrary to what politicians are saying, the vast majority of patients will not be tested for COVID19 at the present time.
* ONLY COMPLETELY WELL children will be seen in the mornings and all sick visits are in the afternoon in an effort to not expose children who are in the office for non-illness related visits**. If you are scheduled for a morning appointment and the patient or parent are sick you will be asked to reschedule.**
* Exam rooms are getting an extra deep cleaning after each visit.
* You may see clinicians in scrubs.
* We may ask you or your child to wear a mask to help prevent the spread of your germs to others. Please take only one mask, they are in limited supply and it is difficult to restock at this time.
* Our staff will be wearing masks, glasses and gloves within 6 feet of all patient contact.
* We have removed all books and toys from our waiting area and rooms.
* Lollipops and stickers are behind the desk for the staff to hand out after your visit
* No office staff will come to work sick. This is not a new policy but we are preparing for a larger number of staff being gone at once. This may result in appointment cancellations with short-notice.
* We are protecting those at greatest risk. At this time, we are asking families to limit each visit to the scheduled patient and one care provider. We know child care is challenging, but if we work together to keep siblings at home then we can best focus on your child. We are sensitive to the generation at greatest risk and prefer all people over the age of 60 stay home.
* Our phone lines are very busy now. Please be patient and kind. Our staff is working as fast as they are able and are under the stress of knowing things may rapidly change.

Please stay tuned to our social channels and website for up-to-date changes. This is a rapidly

evolving situation and our efforts to provide you the safest and most effective care will not stop. We are confident we will be able to work through the next couple months together as a caring community.

Stay calm. Stay safe. Cover your cough and go wash your hands, OFTEN!