

The Silent Pandemic: Avoiding Care is the Next Public Health Crisis Facing Orange County

For a number of years, our organizations have put tremendous effort into creating a healthier, more resilient Orange County. Then the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) entered our community, causing many residents to avoid much-needed emergent and primary healthcare, as well as childhood immunizations, due to the fear of contracting COVID-19 in a healthcare setting. While some care had to be deferred due to restrictions on non-urgent, elective procedures, those restrictions are now lifted. Yet many members of our community continue to avoid care at tremendous cost to their health.

What's been the impact?

We've witnessed people delaying emergent care for strokes — when victims may have benefitted from the clot busting drug, tPA, and had much better outcomes. We've seen a much higher acuity of care needed because of delayed treatment for conditions such as heart attacks and appendicitis. In fact, admissions from our emergency departments for non-COVID-19 cases have increased since the onset of the pandemic because patients are sicker by the time they finally seek care.

The current pandemic also highlights the dangers of an infectious disease without a vaccine. Children are missing scheduled immunizations, including those for whooping cough and measles, creating the potential for disease outbreaks in the coming months. Ordering is down 60% from the CDC's Vaccines for Children, a national program that provides vaccines to approximately half of children in the U.S.

Care cannot be put on hold indefinitely. Chronic conditions and diseases, preventative cancer screenings (e.g., mammograms and colonoscopies), annual physicals, mental health appointments and routine blood tests cannot be put on hold indefinitely without seeing an increase in the severity of conditions that could be more easily treated had they been screened sooner.

What you can do to stay healthy

Members of our community must remain vigilant about their overall health. As the stay-at-home order begins to loosen up, an increase in COVID-19 cases are possible, as the virus is still being transmitted.

Peace of mind for a health concern is just a phone call away. Our nurse hotlines can answer questions and help members of our community decide if they need to come in for care. Telehealth appointments by video or phone allow patients to receive excellent care without leaving their homes.

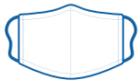
We are helping you safely navigate healthcare in this new landscape by following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and California Department of Public Health guidelines. For concerns, conditions, or routine health maintenance needs that do require an actual visit to a provider such as annual physicals, immunizations, screening procedures and blood tests, we are taking the lead from our national and state agencies.



All healthcare sites undergo frequent and meticulous deep cleaning and disinfection, including all high-touch surfaces, at regular intervals throughout the day.



Patients hospitalized with COVID-19 are isolated from other patients.



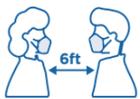
Providers have sufficient quantity of personal protective equipment for all types of procedures, surgeries and services.



Every person entering our facilities is required to wear a face covering or mask and be screened for fever.



Waiting areas have been staged and appointment times are staggered so patients can maintain physical distancing.



Healthcare workers and providers are screened for COVID-19 symptoms and fever prior to working. They are required to wear masks and practice physical distancing.



Hand sanitizer dispensers are located throughout facilities and physician offices.



Patients scheduled for procedures requiring anesthesia are tested for COVID-19 prior to surgery. Those who test positive or exhibit symptoms are provided with instructions for how to isolate and care for themselves at home — and are rescheduled for a later date.



Visitor restrictions are in place, but may vary among our hospitals, particularly for women in labor and delivery, end-of-life, pediatric patients or people with developmental/intellectual disabilities who require support. Visitors are screened for fever and illness.

We recognize that some residents have lost their health insurance in recent weeks due to loss of employment. Our health systems can facilitate the Medi-Cal and Covered California application processes to help families gain access to care.

The health and well-being of Orange County is our collective mission — be assured that keeping you safe and protecting your health and your family's health is our priority, too.

To your health and wellness,

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Children's

hoag

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CARE AGENCY

Chad T. Lefteris
CEO

UCI Health

Kimberly Chavalas Cripe
CEO

CHOC Children's

Robert T. Braithwaite
CEO

Hoag Memorial
Hospital Presbyterian

Marcia Manker
CEO

MemorialCare
Saddleback &
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Medical Centers

Erik G. Wexler
Chief Executive

Providence St. Joseph
Health, Southern
California

Marc Meulman, MPA
Chief of Operations
Public Health Services

Orange County
Health Care Agency