

Why You Should Not be Afraid of Essential Procedures during COVID

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As many of you, if not all, are aware, we are all living and coexisting in the midst of a global health pandemic. Businesses everywhere have closed their doors to the public and shut down. People are being advised to avoid contact with anyone outside of their home unless absolutely essential. These precautions are all for the greater good of the entire population, but at what cost?

Government issued quarantines have been put in place in most states in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19. For the most part, these quarantines are working. In states like Wisconsin, who are under a safer at home order, versus states like Iowa who are not under a government issued quarantine, frequency in COVID cases are drastically different. Iowa has a total of over 11,000 cases of COVID whereas Wisconsin only has just over 9,000 cases. It is clear that the quarantine is working in the states that it has been issued. However, states are having unforeseen problems arise due to fear of contracting this scary virus.

Since COVID-19 hit the United States and individual states issued safer at home orders, routine preventative appointments and cares as well as emergent cases have decreased significantly. Initially it was thought that delaying routine checkups would be necessary in decreasing risk of exposure to COVID-19, now health care facilities are experiencing an increase in problems related to delaying essential cares. Routine preventative appointments in this case would be things such as cancer screenings, physical exams, and even treatable emergent cases such as having a heart attack at home. Studies from electronic medical records vendor Epic, have shown that routine screenings for cancers such as breast, colon, and cervical cancer have decreased between 86%-94% since March. Why? Researchers have found that it is usually due to the fact that people do not trust that the hospitals are clean or free of COVID and they think that delaying a screening for a month or two won't do any harm.

This inference could not be more wrong. Cancer treatments and success in treatments increase greatly if the cancer is caught early, this cannot be done if patients do not go in for routine screenings during the pandemic. Similarly, a study done by the CDC found that childhood vaccine rates have also dropped significantly since the President declared a state of emergency. It was concluded that many parents feared exposing their children to COVID by taking them to hospitals. The CDC urges parents to continue taking their children to hospitals for vaccines even as the COVID pandemic rages on. This is because after social distancing requirements relax, the children who are not vaccinated will be more vulnerable to diseases like measles.

Hospitals around the country are taking extra precautionary steps to ensure that their facilities are clean and safe for the public. Many facilities are requiring that you be screened for symptoms before even entering the facility and once entered you must wear appropriate PPE (personal protective equipment) such as N-95 masks and even PAPR (personal air purifying respirator) suits. As well as personal steps to make the facilities safe, hospitals are also having surgical patients recovered in a negative pressure environment to keep any particles in the air from leaving the room and going into the rest of the facility. The rooms are then emptied for 30 minutes while an air exchange occurs to remove any potentially contaminated particles. These precautionary steps are done to make sure that those entering and leaving the facility are not at risk so that people can continue to receive the appropriate care they need such as cancer screenings or child physical exams.

Public spaces such as supermarkets or banks are the least safe places to be during this pandemic because no screening is being done to decrease risk. By going to a public space where no preventative screening is being done, you are increasing your risk of coming in contact with more people who could be carriers of COVID, yet people are more than willing to go to these places instead of hospitals. I believe this is due to the fact that when people think of hospitals they think of sick people, they don't think of the precautionary steps the hospitals are taking to help make their facilities safe. At a grocery store where no regulation is being done you are putting yourself at the mercy of other people's hygiene and health habits; you may be washing your hands but that doesn't mean everyone else in that store is practicing good hygiene. At a hospital or regulated facility, you can be assured that everyone who is there is screened prior to entering and are deemed safe by trained professionals, this luxury and safety measure does not exist at a grocery store.

All in all it is ultimately your decision as to whether or not you choose to go in for precautionary screening cares, but please consider the measures that hospitals and other health care facilities are taking for your safety.

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