

To The Manhattan Community:

We are writing on behalf of the entire medical community in Manhattan to inform the public about efforts that have been underway for the last two weeks for collaboration and organization to prepare our community for COVID-19. The health of our community, patients, staff, and families are our top priority.

In the last week, an unprecedented collaboration of the independent medical offices in Manhattan, Ascension Via Christi Hospital- Manhattan, Manhattan Surgical Hospital, Lafene Health Center/KSU, and Riley County Health Department has come together multiple times to discuss how we care for people in an effective and efficient manner during this pandemic. In this process, we have created a MHK COVID-19 Command Center that has representatives from the institutions mentioned above as well as each primary care office in town, anesthesia and subspecialty groups, emergency room physicians, dental offices, K-Stat, Irwin Army Hospital, and Meadowlark Hills Retirement Community. The goal is to help coordinate the emergency plan that each of these groups has with the county emergency management process led by the Riley County Health Department, and coordinating with local and regional government and other resources. The group is led by Dr. Hank Doering, general surgeon, and Dr. Matt Floersch, internal medicine. This group has met via video conferencing twice weekly and is in constant email and text communication among providers. The goal is to have a central location for distribution of information to medical providers in town. There is a vast amount of information to be distributed efficiently and it changes quickly from minute to minute. Discussion in the group includes, but is not limited to, processes for evaluation and testing patients, turn-around time for lab tests, monitoring daily in a living document the number of available test swabs, personal protective equipment (masks, gowns, gloves, eye protection), hospital beds, ventilators, etc. between the facilities and offices so that if one group is in need we can efficiently work together to address this as best we can. We are working to share processes in our individual offices where applicable. We hope to be able to work with our local government officials to share perspective, guidance, and advice with how we can keep our community as safe as possible during this time.

We urge the public to heed the direction of the CDC, KDHE, RCHD and diligently practice social distancing and self quarantine when directed based on exposures or travel. We support strict, stay at home orders as enforced in the Kansas City metro area and other communities. This disease affects ALL AGES and many people are asymptomatic carriers. For this reason, avoiding contact with others is of the utmost importance. These measures are critical to decrease the spread of Coronavirus. We must strictly adhere to these guidelines as our resources will be limited if stretched too thin. Please practice frequent hand washing, avoid touching your face, stay home if you are ill, cover your cough or sneeze with your elbow or a tissue and dispose of the tissue.

If you are ill, we request you call your primary care doctor's office first for advice on what you should do. It is important to call before entering a medical office, urgent care, or hospital, to minimize risk of exposure for others. There is a screening hotline 785-323-6400 through the Riley County Health Department that is answered by medical providers and nurses in the community to help answer general questions about COVID-19 and help patients determine where they need to go if needing medical attention. For general information about COVID-19 the public can call to the Kansas Department of Health & Environment 1-866-534-3463.

Finally, we want to remind our community that our offices and local hospitals are open. We recognize that there are many other medical issues people continue to experience daily. We have gone to great lengths to assure safety of our patients and staff during this time so patients with other medical problems can continue to receive care. In some cases, we are screening patients in different areas, and some offices are offering telehealth options depending on the patient needs. Please do not hesitate from seeking care due to concerns for contracting the virus at your local hospital or doctor's office!

In the past several weeks we have witnessed extraordinary volatility in the health of our nation—physically and emotionally. Know that your local health care providers and leaders are working diligently to keep Manhattan and the surrounding Flint Hills area in a position that we “flatten the curve” and use our resources in the best way possible. Some areas of the United States are already experiencing devastation from COVID-19, we are in a critical period to make a tremendous difference and avoid this devastation. Please work with us in keeping our community healthy, safe, and united.

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