

We as your local emergency physicians are writing to address the current state of COVID in our community. This is a real threat, and it is getting worse daily- there is no exaggeration in saying that. As of today, there have been a total of 660 cases of COVID in Ravalli County. Over half of these are active cases, which means that the number of total infections has doubled in the last three weeks. If this trend continues, our local healthcare resources will quickly become overwhelmed; indeed, this is already starting to occur. We are on the brink of disaster.

As the number of patients ill with COVID surges, local hospitals are approaching- and with increasing frequency reaching- their bed capacities. This means that our ability to safely care for patients is becoming compromised. We have treated patients with life-threatening illnesses such as heart attacks that we can't appropriately transfer because of the overcapacity of ALL hospitals in our region. There have been situations when we are forced to transfer critically ill patients out of state. These aren't just COVID patients; with hospitals reaching critical capacity, the ability to care appropriately for any critically ill patient is threatened. We don't have the bed capacity, and neither do any of our regional hospitals. It is our mission and passion as emergency physicians to provide unsurpassed emergency care to each and every member of our community who requires our services, at the moment it is needed. However, it is becoming increasingly clear to us that we need your help in order to do this effectively.

Please help us by following the recommendations put forth by state and local health officials. Measures like avoiding large gatherings, wearing a mask in public, practicing social distancing, and following the county's guidelines to quarantine if you have had close contact with someone with COVID. Another way to help would be to stay in contact and keep appointments with your Primary Care Providers and following their guidance. These small and easy steps will go a long way in helping to curb this crisis and the overcrowding of our medical resources. We recognize the controversies surrounding the above measures. We recognize that it requires real sacrifice to change one's habits, whether that means wearing a mask when you go to the grocery store or church, or whether it means cancelling a much anticipated gathering. We recognize the psychological impact these changes can have. We are also personally struggling with these choices on a daily basis. But we hope to appeal to our better angels, with the belief that these self-restricting choices will ultimately give us more freedoms by keeping our local businesses open and bring our beloved community back to normal as soon as possible.

As emergency physicians, but also as members of your community, as your neighbors and friends, we are pleading for your help. We cannot do this without you. We believe the quickest path to normalcy- and the one with fewest casualties- is to take this threat seriously today. The decisions you make matter- they matter right now, and they will have an impact on our foreseeable future. Thank you for caring for one another, and for making this community such a fine place to work and live.

Respectfully,

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