

October 11, 2020

Dear Tullyview Allergy patients:

Unfortunately as cooler weather is approaching and more people are gathering indoors for school, at restaurants and at family events, COVID case rates are rising in Berks County and are expected to go even higher. Quarantine fatigue has also set in as the pandemic has stretched on for months with no definite end in sight, and it is hard not to let one's guard down. We need to avoid becoming lax about the rules we have in place.

So far we have kept COVID out of our office with our social distancing protocols, but the challenge is going to become greater as the new case rate is climbing towards where it was at its peak in springtime. We are doing our best to prevent having to close the office to patient visits again, but in order to remain open we will have to more strictly enforce the rules actually put in place months ago. Most importantly:

- 1) Masks should be worn by all persons two and over in the office at all times. Masks should not be removed once you are in a room, even if you are by yourself, as office staff will be coming and going from that room for history taking, examinations, testing and cleaning afterwards. Mask wearing reduces the spread of respiratory particles we release simply by breathing, and it is perhaps the single most important thing we can do to prevent the spread of coronavirus at this time.
- 2) Masks/face coverings should be worn properly, covering both the mouth and nose. We do not have enough masks to give out to those who have forgotten theirs. People without masks will have to reschedule their shot or office appointment.
- 3) Those children older than their 2nd birthday but still not cooperative with mask wearing will need to have their appointment postponed or switched to a telemed visit if insurance allows.
- 4) Do not come to the office if you are sick or you have been exposed to COVID. Even if you do not have a fever, your symptoms of bad cough, body aches and sore throat are more likely to be COVID-related than allergy-related. Especially if they are of recent onset! Given our office's small size and the vulnerable population we serve, we simply cannot risk bringing you inside and potentially allow an infection to spread to our staff or another patient. As we've said before, please contact our office ahead of time, as we may be able to help you by phone or telemed, or direct you to an urgent care center if appropriate.
- 5) Please do not bring extra people to the office. This means only one parent (and no siblings) should accompany a child for a shot or office appointment, and an adult scheduled for a shot or office appointment should only have another adult support person present when it is absolutely necessary. We understand that work scheduling, virtual schooling and other childcare issues can make logistics difficult, but every additional breathing body that enters the office increases the chance that an asymptomatic COVID carrier will be among them.

6) Please respect your appointment time, whether it be for a shot or office appointment. They are staggered deliberately to reduce the flow of patients coming into the office at one time. Arriving at your appointment significantly early can sometimes be as disruptive as coming too late. We will return to our open door shot policy when it is safe, but now is not that time.

7) Please follow the instructions on our lawn signs and do not approach the building until you are called up by the nurses. The instructions apply to all patients, whether you are here for an office appointment, shot appointment, or just dropping off/picking up a school form.

8) Recommendations from the CDC and the State Board of Health are constantly changing. If the Pennsylvania case rate goes much higher (higher than other states), then the current quarantine rules regarding travel to other states may become irrelevant. But they still matter now and are still being enforced.

The consequences of a COVID infection entering the office could range from the office closing for everything (shots and office visits) for two weeks at a minimum, to the spread of infection to another patient or serious illness in a staff member at worst. As the head of this office, it is my duty to try my best to ensure the safety of everyone, including my staff, so that we can continue to provide quality care to you and our other patients. Our protocols are not meant to be a political statement, or pick on people who might be having a more difficult time coping with the various hardships that the pandemic has imposed on us. At the end of the day, in order to say that we did everything we could to remain safe, we will need to enforce the rules that were designed to accomplish this, even when they are inconvenient. Therefore, there may be times when persons are turned away from the office when they can't comply with the rules, even if they had an appointment. If persons continually disregard them or blatantly flaunt the rules, they will be discharged from the practice.

I apologize for sounding harsh, but unfortunately the stakes have never been higher.

Respectfully,

Ed Skorpinski, MD