



March 5, 2020

To: Joint meeting of the House and Senate Health Care Committees

Re: COVID-19 in Oregon

Chair Monnes Anderson, Chair Salinas, and Members of the House and Senate Health Care Committees,

For the record, my name is Dr. Dawn Nolt and I am the Pediatric Medical Director for Infection Prevention and Control at OHSU.

As you know, the recent cases in Oregon demonstrate that there is local transmission of COVID-19 in our community. Given this, increased efforts must be made to educate the public on infectious disease prevention and the best ways to access health care that limit exposure to vulnerable citizens.

One of the biggest challenges in controlling the spread of the virus is that the symptoms are virtually the same as in any other respiratory virus. Without a point of care diagnostic test, it's difficult to know who has flu or other respiratory viruses and who has COVID-19. What is needed is more efficient access to diagnostic testing. There has been an unfortunate and disappointing delay in establishing these tests, but we are hopeful that they will be made commercially available by Friday, when FDA is expected to approve a number of tests. It is important to note, physicians will not be able to use these tests until their facility internally assess performance, which can take an additional week after initial purchase.

In any respiratory viral season, we are screening patients for respiratory symptoms at all areas of check in to the health care system, including clinics and emergency rooms, and asking those with symptoms to put on a mask, and to place them in a separate room as quickly as possible.

We also don't want people just walking in to clinic or emergency rooms with concerns that their cold, cough or fever is due to COVID-19. We ask that citizens who feel ill call ahead to their doctor so that appropriate measures can be taken to limit exposure to other patients.

What we know from study of COVID-19 cases in China is that 81% of cases were mild. This is part of the reason why the virus has been efficient at spreading, because people with mild illness are not likely to stay at home and avoid exposing others.

Even though the vast majority of cases are mild, people can have severe or critical illness, in China, 14% and 4% respectively. The overall mortality rate in China has been around 2.3%. So far, the mortality rate outside of China has been lower, around 1.5%.

This time of year, we still have other seasonal respiratory viruses circulating in the community, such as influenza, RSV, rhinovirus, and ordinary coronavirus. For some people, these viruses can cause severe illness too. These viruses are much more common right now than COVID-19, but thankfully, the same prevention techniques apply to all of these viruses.

Practicing effective hand washing, 20 seconds or more with soap, and responsibly covering coughs and sneezes, will help Oregonians protect themselves from exposure to influenza, other respiratory viruses, and COVID-19. Employers, family and community members should encourage those who are feeling unwell to remain at home to the extent possible.

We are happy to take any questions that you might have. Thank you.

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