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Update 64 - COVID-19 – From Office of the Medical Director 26MAR2021 1000

To: All EMS Personnel in the EMS System for Metropolitan Oklahoma City & Tulsa

Key Content:

- **Where We Are – COVID Confirmed Cases in Our EMS System**

We all need some relief from the continuous COVID news cycle, thus the purposeful interim since Update 63. I've been keeping pace with the news to be certain, but even I have enjoyed reading daily newsfeeds that the first, second, third, fourth (get the idea?) news items are NOT COVID, COVID, COVID, COVID... a promising sign of even better days and nights ahead for all of us.

If you remember one message from Update 64, in the words of a very experienced clinical leader (and no, that's not a self-reference) in our EMS system, it's this: **"Don't let off the gas."** This of course means continue your healthy habits at work and away from work, too. There will be a time that the SARS-CoV-2 virus doesn't pose the risks that it has for the past year, but we are not quite there just yet. So, I agree: "Don't let off the gas."

Now, that said, you've surely noticed what I have. The ice and snow have disappeared. The snow disappearance might be a bit sad for your snowman-building kids and your rolling-in-the-snow dogs, but I am a decidedly sun person and this weather change is much welcomed. You'll hear and even read in some internet spaces that the spring and summer will magically make COVID disappear. Not. so. much. We confirmed that wasn't true last year, didn't we?

However, and this is an important however for both your mental and physical health... the warmer weather does allow us more outdoors time and that is safer when considering how the SARS-CoV-2 virus spreads. Thus, you'll increasingly find me walking and cycling, sans mask at that. I am conscious to still keep some distance between me and fellow walkers and cyclers, but I truly believe such activities are safe, made all the safer by vaccinations that are increasingly common in Oklahoma by the day.

I'm a fan of both the Oklahoma City County Health Department and the Tulsa Health Department. These two metropolitan public health authorities have done fantastic work over the past year and particularly over the past several weeks in increasingly rolling out vaccinations for our communities and more pointedly, into our fellow citizens. If for whatever reason(s) you haven't been vaccinated yet, please do so. It is the safest single action you can take in the big picture when protecting you and your family from COVID. And then encourage others to get vaccinated, too.

Speaking of that point, I got a great question from one of our EMS system clinicians about which is better protection, having COVID (and obviously recovering from it) with "natural immunity" or getting the vaccination? Very thought provoking.

The evidence to date supports that vaccinations give us better and broader protection against the “baseline” SARS-CoV-2 virus and even its variants of concern, too. So, while I’m quite sure those who are now recovered from acute COVID didn’t want to have it in the first place, we want those folks to get vaccinated as well for the additional protection that provides. It’s still the CDC recommendation to wait approximately 3 months after the active COVID infection to get vaccinated.

And speaking of the CDC, yes, there are new recommendations about what you, I, and others post-vaccination can do that we weren’t supposed to do a year ago. You can find those here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>

Those guidelines are helpful to many folks, but honestly can be unintentionally confusing when applied to what you and I do professionally in healthcare. I was asked this week, “Can we quit wearing masks in the ambulance cabs and fire stations? Do you know what a pain that is?”

So, in reverse order.... yes, it is a pain and no, keep doing the safe thing by masking. The issue isn’t so much you, but all the others around you – family, friends, etc. We are still learning about how much protection that these vaccines provide (or don’t) in not just keeping us healthy but keeping us from spreading COVID unintentionally to others. I do believe in time, which will provide for more of our family members and friends to get vaccinated, that we’ll get back to mask-free times in EMS.

As to what the “new normal” in EMS and in the broader picture of life will be? That’s still TBD (to be determined). Much like the HIV emergence in the early 1980s changed the understanding and recognition of bloodborne pathogens in EMS and the rest of healthcare, bringing with it markedly increased use of gloves, this pandemic may bring a lasting realization that we’ve needed to be more conscientious of respiratory pathogens, too. While that doesn’t equate to living behind a mask for all times in EMS ahead, I do think we’ll find ourselves reaching for masks more frequently than we did pre-2020.

My insider sources tell me that the CDC is working on some updated guidelines that will more directly apply to us as EMS professionals and I’ll certainly welcome those to help us be even more clear on what actions we can safely start relaxing.

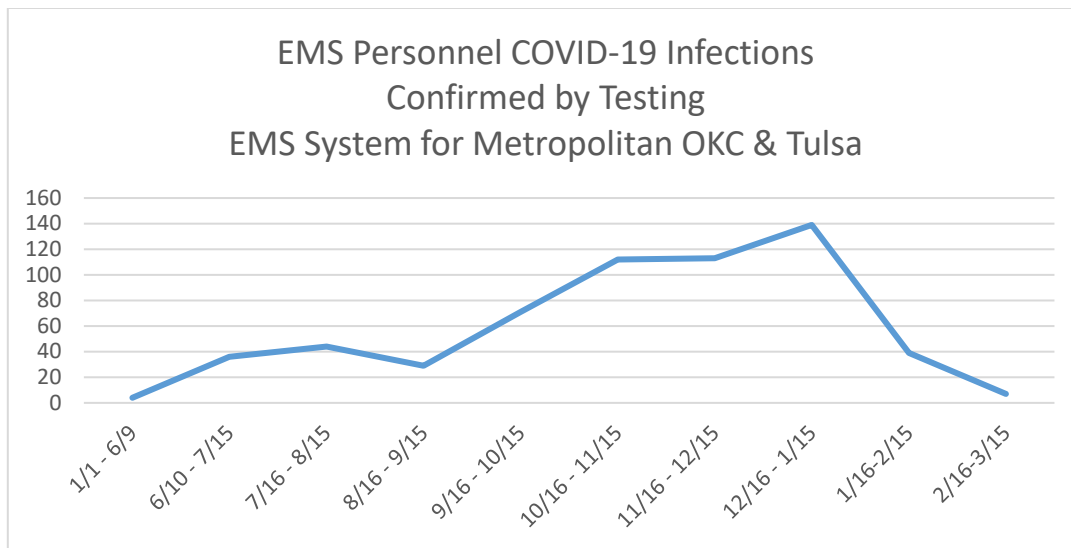
Now, ready for some more good news? Great, here it is!

Where We Are – COVID Confirmed Cases in Our EMS System

The curve is staying bent in the right direction. Ongoing thanks to the OMD team and all those involved in helping us collect this important information every 30 days so we can all be smarter about at least some of the impact of this viral pandemic upon our EMS system.

As you take in this latest set of numbers, which are definitively people – our sisters and brothers in EMS - please keep in conscious thought the importance of continuing to get your COVID vaccinations until completed and of encouraging others to get theirs when they are eligible and able. You didn’t think I would pass up another opportunity to encourage that, did you?

Recall we have two pathways out of this pandemic: 1) smart infection control with “MEGG” PPE at work, and masks, distancing, and handwashing in our lives away from work; and 2) vaccinations, preferably for everyone that medically can receive them.



Here's the full results for our EMS system family since the pandemic's beginning. Keep in mind, as you see the data points, these are new infections in the time periods indicated, not cumulative infections:

Through 6/9/20	4 individuals
6/10/20 - 7/15/20	36 individuals
7/16/20 - 8/15/20	44 individuals
8/16/20 - 9/15/20	29 individuals
9/16/20 - 10/15/20	71 individuals
10/26/20 - 11/15/20	112 individuals
11/16/20 - 12/15/20	113 individuals
12/16/20 - 1/15/21	139 individuals
1/16/21-2/15/21	39 individuals
2/16/21 - 3/15/21	7 individuals

Overall, this represents a cumulative number of 594 individuals in our EMS system with confirmed COVID-19 infection (not suspected infection without positive test results) through the last reporting date of 3/15/21.

Three final (for now) thoughts:

1) Looking again at that above graph, great job! YOU did it. All the safety actions YOU took and are continuing to take are making a difference in our EMS family, helping make things safer for YOU going home to your non-work family, too.

2) Speaking of great work YOU did, I hope you've already seen my communication earlier this week about calendar year 2019 cardiac arrest outcomes. I can't say enough how proud I am of YOUR contributions to those lives saved and the incredible work that Matt Cox, the MCB/OMD Division Chief – Critical Care Analytics, does. We wouldn't be where we are in lifesaving without YOU and without Matt. Just in case you haven't seen it:

http://www.oktulomd.com/assets/front/omd_materials/memo/2019_CA_Outcomes_Announcement_Memo_.pdf

3) Want to guess what this point will be?... yes, your assessment skills didn't fail you!... "Don't let off the gas."

Vigilance. Safety. Evidence-Based Service to Others.

Let's be careful out there.

Dr. Goodloe

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