

Letter from doctors

The following is a letter 33 local physicians listed below sent to the Statesboro City Council.

Dear local and state officials:

We are physicians who serve Statesboro and the surrounding communities. Collectively we are acting to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as it enters our community. This letter and our signatures represent our individual professional opinions regarding swift and bold action that must occur to curb the potentially-devastating impact on our hospitals, our patients, the city of Statesboro, and the state of Georgia.

It is inevitable that the virus enters our community, as neighboring cities and counties are beginning to report positive results of the COVID-19 test. It is not a question of IF, but WHEN. As are many communities and hospitals across the country, we are woefully underprepared for the number of people who will need treatment when it comes to availability of ICU beds, ventilators, personal protective equipment. Our only action then is to make choices which may slow the spread of the virus, so that we have a chance to not completely overwhelm our healthcare infrastructure to the point where rationing lifesaving measures becomes a reality.

As such we implore you to put a shelter in place order effective immediately, or as soon as is feasibly possible.

We understand that there will be unintended consequences of these drastic measures, but the alternative is worse. If we cannot slow down the rate of infection immediately, our health care system will be overwhelmed. This is what we mean when we say to “flatten the curve.”

We applaud your sophisticated understanding of this disease and its spread. As you and your public health advisors likely already know, COVID-19 is contracted through respiratory droplets (sneezes, cough, just breathing, on hands/surfaces) and should be considered highly contagious. While the majority of patients (>80%) will recover without the need to be in the hospital, up to 10% will be so ill they need to be admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU). The death rate is much higher than with seasonal influenza, particularly for people with certain medical problems. The death rate is also significantly higher for patients over age 60 and possibly over 20% for those over the age of 80.

The recommended measures of personal hand hygiene, avoiding touching your face, and aggressive social distancing are burdensome but are the best measures to reduce the number of people getting sick. Just as important, these measures will reduce the speed with which the virus spreads. If we can reduce the number of cases but also double or triple the time over which those cases happen, the healthcare system will be less likely to be overwhelmed by the demand; this is “flattening the curve.”

East Georgia Regional Medical Center (EGRMC) has a total of 24 critical care beds. You can imagine how quickly these will fill if our community becomes sick all at once. Slowing the spread or “flattening the curve” will undoubtedly save lives.

The timing and scope of these additional measures are difficult considerations. It is possible that any measures at this time could be deemed either overly aggressive or too late. With that in mind, we advocate for steps that may be deemed overly aggressive, as this is preferred in matters of community safety. We commend you and city leaders for the aggressive actions you have taken to date, such as closing our public schools and also canceling any large official gatherings to lower the likelihood of community spread.

The hours and days ahead will be critical to mitigating community spread. While recommendations for hand hygiene and social distancing are spot on, their voluntary implementation in our community are clearly challenging and not optimally effective given the exponential growth in COVID-19 cases in numerous communities across the country despite widely-publicized recommendations for social distancing.

We know these are difficult steps, and we are hesitant to have to recommend them. We as a state may face short-term economic set-backs as a result, but the long-term economic consequences of not acting now are greater. The big-picture perspective is necessary.

We also want to acknowledge that this virus tends to be surprisingly mild and well-tolerated in most kids, healthy young adults, and middle-aged adults. This makes it really tempting to say it isn't a big deal, most people get this virus. Although they may not be severely affected by the virus, young, healthy people must practice social distancing. In South Korea, where significantly-more testing has been done, 20-29 year-olds represented 30% of those infected. Individuals in this age group can have relatively mild symptoms but still spread the COVID-19 virus. If infected, older family members, friends, or other vulnerable community members may be hospitalized or die with this virus, particularly if there are shortages of medical care.

Hindsight will not look kindly on actions that are taken too late here. Moreover, as health professionals, we know that the weeks to come are already at risk of overwhelming our fragile healthcare system. Please help us so we can help our community face this crisis.

Thank you for your consideration of our perspective. We would be happy to discuss further if you have questions or concerns. Likewise, we would be happy to provide resources and guidance to you.

Best regards,

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Obstetrics and Gynecology

Ogeechee OB/GYN

Scott Mikell, MD

Family Medicine and Geriatric Medicine

Statesboro Family Practice

Ian Munger, MD

Emergency Medicine

East Georgia Regional Medical Center

Sreelu Dega, MD

Urgent care Physician

Mednow / Northside Hospitals - Augusta / Atlanta

Ruthie Crider, MD

Emergency Medicine

East Georgia Regional Medical Center

Hugh James, MD

Anesthesiology

Anesthesia Management Associates

Albert Lee, MD

Anesthesiology

James Hiller, MD

Obstetrics and Gynecology

Southern OB/GYN

Ajay Jain, MD

Cardiology

Cardiovascular Associates of Eastern Georgia

Rani Reddy, MD

Internal Medicine

Candler Internal Medicine

Brian Moogerfeld, MD

Internal Medicine

Moogerfeld Internal Medicine

Maria Moogerfeld, MD

Internal Medicine

Moogerfeld Internal Medicine

Angela Davis, MD

Family Medicine

Family Health Care Center

Anna Benson, MD

Pediatrics

Mama Doc Pediatrics

Al Palmer, MD

Obstetrics and Gynecology

East Georgia Women's Center

Benjamin Oldham, MD

Obstetrics and Gynecology

Ogeechee OB/GYN

Gary Sullivan, MD

Obstetrics and Gynecology

Statesboro OB/GYN Specialists

Glen J Dasher, MD

Family Medicine

Southern Family Medicine

Luke Krautter, MD

Family Medicine

Southern Family Medicine

Matt Phillips, MD

Family Medicine

Southern Family Medicine

Carla Branch, MD

Family Medicine

Statesboro Family Practice

Mark McCracken, MD

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Randy Smith, MD

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Thomas J Miller, MD

Family Medicine

Southern Family Medicine-Claxton

Uday K Tata, MD

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Wayne R Bryan, MD

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Kashyap Patel, MD

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Justin Rountree, MD

Anesthesia/Pain Management

East Georgia Regional Medical Center

Pediatrician

Cheryl E Perkins MD

Pediatrician

Michael Taormina MD

Neurologist

Anthony Chappell MD

Cardiologist