

July 13, 2020 - Coronavirus Update

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Good afternoon,

The [New York Times](#) last Wednesday ranked Arizona No. 1 for the most confirmed new coronavirus cases in the world, reporting that an alarming rate of increase in infections was continuing. Nationally, as of today, news sources rank Arizona third in coronavirus cases per 100,000 people (1,683), after New York (2,065) and New Jersey (1,974).

We've been reading for at least ten days that an exponential increase in "COVID cases" has occurred in Arizonans younger than 44 and we must prepare for an imminent hospital services collapse. Our news is telling us that a lot has changed since we came out of lockdown and not for the better. But it hasn't just gotten bad, it's gotten really, really bad: it is exponentially bad!

I have a son at UArizona and I have a daughter going into high school. I have a high-risk family member (and I don't like admitting my age isn't in my favor either). My job requires me to get onto airplanes, travel in cars with people, and meet a lot of people of all age groups, in all demographics and political persuasions—all the time—in addition to being with college students and ALVSCE employees.

Nature on July 8 published "[Mounting evidence suggests coronavirus is airborne — but health advice has not caught up.](#)" We're familiar with the data behind this assertion. The WHO now states, "Aerosol transmission, particularly in these indoor locations where there are crowded and inadequately ventilated spaces where infected persons spend long periods of time with others, *cannot be ruled out.*" I found this [Vox article](#) about it useful, though not comforting.

If you think this news is scary, I am right there with you.

Naturally, many university faculty members and schoolteachers are deeply concerned about going back into the classroom to teach face-to-face (and I include *Extension "classrooms"*). I am nervous about it too, right now.

Provost Folks on Saturday sent an email to faculty in which she wrote, "I anticipate that we will need to approach the start of the semester with maximum flexibility, in order to be responsive to the local conditions in mid-August."

This means, that thankfully, I don't have to do any of these things, *right now*.

Right now, unlike our hospital health providers, I think most of us are in the eye of a storm. A time of relative calm. The next part of our "storm" will be bad, but I don't know how bad. It could be as bad as I am worried about, or not fulfill my worst imaginings. I just don't know. But we must take time to lower our adrenaline and cortisol levels when possible. I know that mine will be up again soon enough. We all need some time to decompress a little, so please join me for an Eye of The Storm Zoom happy hour at 5:30 p.m. today.

There is some inkling of positive information. College of Medicine-Tucson Dean Mike Abecassis last Friday told me and the other deans that our hospital health providers are in the middle of dealing with the greatest COVID disease load that they have faced so far; that Tucson hospitals risk having to slow down taking care of non-COVID patients; but that the pressure on the Tucson hospitals had seemed to have plateaued and was possibly even lowering; that, though our health heroes are "close to the brink",

they are “hanging in there.” I am sure you will join me in thanking these heroes and their families for battling their greatest challenge so far.

Moreover, we are seeing that because most new SARS-CoV2 infections since lockdown are in younger Arizonans, most of these infections are resulting in much less, and much less severe, disease. There are fewer, shorter, hospital stays. Arizona’s SARS-CoV2 infection mortality rate is much lower than two weeks ago.

As we all know by now, SARS-CoV2 infection rates can get out of hand quickly. Though the disease rate is brought under control more slowly, the start of the semester is still a long way away in “COVID-time”. If we are indeed at a state disease plateau, then there is still time for us to see our infection risk to drop considerably. This week, Arizonans’ behavior over the 4th of July weekend will play out in our hospitals. This week will be telling. I will be tuning in to hear President Robbins and the Campus Reentry Task Force Thursday at 10 a.m. to hear more on our current situation.

Because we will know much more in the next few weeks—and I am personally balancing the risk of COVID for myself, my family and our community with the risk of devastating university job losses—I was reassured to read Provost Folks’ statement.

I would never expect anyone to take a risk that I wouldn’t take, and I do not want COVID. I don’t want you to get COVID. President Robbins has made it clear many times that we will not be going into classrooms if conditions are not safe.

Almost everyone I see on my rare jaunts from home is wearing a mask and wearing it properly so I’m hopeful that in the next few weeks before students come back, the risk will decrease greatly.

My mask protects you, your mask protects me. We’ve controlled infectious diseases without vaccines for thousands of years. **Wearing our masks** means we can have a functioning economy and concurrently save thousands of lives.

All UA employees must wear a face covering inside all UA buildings (except when in private offices, work spaces, and formal meeting areas where physical distancing of at least six feet is possible) and in UA outdoor spaces except where physical distancing of at least six feet is possible.

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The University of Arizona is located statewide on the ancestral homelands of indigenous peoples.