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Missouri Pediatricians Encourage Well-Care During Crisis

Ask your primary care doctor about telemedicine options

Missouri pediatricians have been proactively monitoring and responding to the COVID-19 epidemic. The Missouri Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (MOAAP), as an organization of the state's pediatric providers, has been helping pediatric offices to collaborate in keeping their patients safe and healthy as they respond to this unprecedented challenge.

With the presence of COVID-19 cases in the state, pediatric and family medical offices have implemented protocols to ensure children and families stay safe, while receiving routine well care.

Telemedicine (or telehealth), which means conducting patient visits using a video and audio connection, is a modality that many pediatricians were using prior to this pandemic. Due to COVID-19, practices around Missouri have either started or greatly expanded their telemedicine capabilities. Pediatricians are using different technological platforms to host visits – Zoom, WebEx, Skype and others – and are reporting overall success. Telemedicine allows doctors to address many routine complaints, such as respiratory infections, rashes, stomach pain, eye infections, and injuries without an in-person visit. Insurance companies are often now covering these visits.

For visits that need an in-person examination or immunizations, doctors are stepping up precautions: bringing patients directly from their cars to a room, utilizing separate entrances, completely separating office space between sick and well children, or holding well visits first and then sick visits later in the afternoon with additional cleaning procedures in between visits. These extra steps are being taken in order to prioritize patient safety and health. Clinics are adapting their office visit procedures weekly based on up to date guidance. **We encourage all patients to call their local clinic to discuss if an in-person visit is needed, should be delayed, or switched to a telehealth visit.**

As the epidemic continues, and with public health leaders predicting possible recurrent outbreaks, Missouri pediatricians are also concerned about patients' ability to receive needed care. Some children with chronic conditions can be hospitalized if they do not have appropriate preventive care – and this is the last thing we want.



Healthy children also need immunizations, developmental screens and periodic growth checks. Skipping vaccinations decreases herd immunity, and increases risk for whooping cough, measles and bloodstream infections. The AAP states that “immunizing the youngest children is top priority in the context of well child care” and recommends continuing well child checks for children under 2, while delaying those for older children for the time being.

MOAAP urges families to reach out to their doctors to ask about telemedicine options and other visit precautions. If we delay needed care, and immunizations, we risk other health problems as well. We hope to work together to be there for our patients and do the best thing for children’s health.

References:

AAP guidance, <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/covid-19-clinical-guidance-q-a/>
AAP video on talking to and supporting children during a pandemic, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcYZWiF3PNc&feature=youtu.be>