Choosing the right care can help hospitals in this critical time

Today we find ourselves in a challenging position. Central Ohio's emergency departments, urgent care locations and hospitals are at critical capacity.

Our waiting rooms are filled with people seeking care for COVID-19. Hundreds of patients who have been admitted to our hospitals are still waiting in our emergency departments for beds in our intensive care and medical-surgical units to open.

We always want people to call 911 and come to our emergency departments if they need lifesaving care. And we still want people to come to our urgent care locations when they need immediate treatment.

But unless your COVID-19 symptoms are worsening or life-threatening, you have better care options that can help us stay focused on delivering advanced care to those who need it most.

Here are four ways you can help.

First, if you have concerns about exposure but aren't experiencing symptoms, or need proof that you don't have COVID-19 for travel requirements or event access, find COVID-19 testing sites near you at coronavirus.ohio.gov/testing. We suggest getting testing at retail pharmacies, local libraries, or public health clinics.

Second, we recommend checking with your primary care provider before seeking urgent care. Primary care is your best resource for basic healthcare needs, and can connect you to the right level of services or testing. If you don't have a primary care provider, this is a good time to select one.

Third, we encourage you to try telemedicine options from your healthcare or health insurance provider. Virtual care and video visits are convenient and safe, saving you from long waits for in-office care, and keeping our urgent care locations accessible for urgent needs.

Lastly, but most importantly, get vaccinated and wear masks. These continue to be the most powerful tools we have to keep emergency care and hospital care available to all. Whether you are finally ready to get your first shot, or are preparing for the arrival of vaccine boosters, you can find vaccine locations near you at vaccines.gov. The vaccine is available at no cost to you.

The means to end this pandemic are here, but we're not yet at the end of the road. Please help us, by seeking the right care, at the right place, at the right time.

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