



**MAY 1, 2020**

## **KCMS Statement on Reopening the County**

Now more than ever, Californians are relying on physicians to help guide them through these difficult times. While the outbreak of COVID-19 has created tremendous uncertainty throughout our communities, we have seen countless physicians put their own health and safety at risk to treat people facing a new, deadly disease.

The opinions made by doctors Daniel Erickson and Artin Messihi have earned attention across the state, but it is the opinion of the Kern County Medical Society (KCMS) that the course we are on, is the course that is in the best interest of our communities and our patients.

We support the statement made by the Public Information Officer for Kern County Public Health, Michelle Corson, "There are top medical minds in our state, in our county, in our nation that are providing this guidance to us. And we concur that these are actions that we should be taking right now and we are steadfast in our recommendation to our community to continue this."

Physicians understand the tremendous stress and discomfort that stay at home orders have created for people across the state, the country and the world. We want to get back to normal. We know that people are hurting economically. Many physician offices have also had to close their doors and furlough or lay off employees over the last several weeks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a great deal of mental anguish and economic uncertainty that should not be downplayed or underestimated, and that carries its own health risks.

But there is a right way to go about reopening our society. It must be done in a way that is anchored in scientific fact and expertise. Over the last several days, Gov. Newsom has started to [chart out a course](#) for California to get back to work, and back to something like our normal lives. Meanwhile, the California Medical Association, has established some [guidelines and best practices](#) for physicians to start reopening their offices and ensure that Californians can get the health care they need.

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As COVID-19 has wreaked havoc with our communities, many people have opted to stay out of the doctor's office. The number of reported stroke and heart attack cases in hospitals around the country is down as much as 30 percent. That's not because people are having fewer strokes or heart attacks. It's because people are trying to do the right thing by staying home, and many may be afraid of putting themselves in harm's way by going to see a doctor.

Unfortunately, this well-intentioned way of thinking may lead to much more complex problems in the future, as patients miss routine screenings and preventative care.

With proper safety precautions, a doctor's office is one of the safest places for a patient to be. Reopening them is an important step for California to take as a state.

It's not just emergency services. It's also things like well-child visits, to ensure that kids are getting proper immunizations. There is also evidence that the shutdown of pediatric practices has caused a drop in child abuse reporting. Cases of abuse are often caught during well child visits, which are not routinely happening. By staying out of the doctor's office, these children are being left at risk.

Physicians and patients are taking precautions to minimize risk and ensure the doctor's office is a safe place to go. While many of us have ramped up efforts to service patients with telehealth visits, certain things just can't be done over the phone or in a Zoom meeting.

All practices and facilities must adopt comprehensive safety protocols including universal masking for patients, physical distancing, and removing toys and magazines from waiting rooms. The reopening of our health care system may also be regional. The reopening of California's health care system will not happen all at once, and will not be a one size fits all approach. The size and scope of the COVID-19 Pandemic in California calls for a regional, phased approach that recognizes local circumstances in the various parts of this diverse state.

The road back from the COVID-19 pandemic will not be easy. As many have said, it will not simply be a light switch that is turned on all at once that allows us all to instantly return to the way things were just a couple of months ago. It will be a winding road of ups and downs, with some trial and error. But if we do it responsibly, we can ensure we are protecting each other the best we can, in a responsible way, as we all work together to rebuild our lives and our communities.