



Kansas State Council of SHRM, Inc.
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KS SHRM COVID-19 WEBINAR DISCUSSION

May 20, 2020

Topic: Real Talk with Dr. Minns: Separating Fact from Fiction

Guest:

- Dr. Garold Minns, M.D.

Questions answered on the call:

1. We have created a paid sick leave policy for this pandemic. Is that something we have to post and/or share with our employees now? Or can we just hold onto it for the time being? And if we have to share it, what is the best way to communicate this information to them?

I'm not an HR expert but I do know that the FFCRA was passed and should inform criteria. Please see the archived Q & A materials from past calls on the KS SHRM website.

2. I've seen differing opinions on what to do about someone that has been exposed to someone with COVID. Some say 14-day quarantine and others say monitor symptoms and stay home only if you are ill. We are a medical office billing staff. What is correct?

Contact your health care provider to be tested and then quarantine for 14 days. If you can't get tested, stay in quarantine and take your temperature daily. Contact your doctor with symptoms.

3. Scenario: My son's friends brother tested positive for COVID. My son works with his friend (close proximity). His friend is getting tested. Should I (mom) stay home from work to be safe?

Your son probably needs to be tested. If he's negative, it's likely you shouldn't worry but the health department can help answer these questions. If he tests positive, then quarantine. Each case is different and requires individual attention. Contact your doctor or the health department.

4. Are there enough tests for everyone in Kansas to be tested?

There are not enough for everyone, but we are improving. Kansas had the fewest supplies of tests in the nation for some reason.

5. Is the CDC requiring that ALL individuals scheduled for same day procedures at a surgery center be tested for COVID-19 before they can have their procedure completed?

I don't believe those are CDC guidelines but rather an individual hospital determination as there are some towns in Kansas that haven't seen a single case of the virus yet.

6. The nasal swab test looks incredibly painful. Is it? Are there alternate options for testing youth?

I consider the test to be more uncomfortable than painful, and makes you feel a bit "gaggy." There is an oral swab if the nasal swab isn't tolerated but it might not be as accurate.



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7. We're planning to open our community pool in a couple of weeks. Should lifeguards and patrons wear masks?

Lifeguards are normally sitting in a tower or at a distance and their transmission likelihood is low, so I wouldn't personally suggest it.

8. Should we all be wearing masks? I've heard that we shouldn't (unless sick) to increase the timeline for herd immunity.

This is difficult to answer. While 80% of the population handles the virus well and could handle herd immunity, we don't know which 20% are the ones that will be affected the most and get the sickest. If they get the virus, it could overwhelm the hospitals. For me, wearing a mask is a no-brainer and a simple thing. While it's not perfect, it does limit the ability to spread to others to some degree. I don't believe we'll have herd immunity at least for the next 6-month projection. We also likely won't have a vaccine or treatments so I think we're all going to have to learn to deal with this for at least 6-7 months. There will probably not be a vaccine until 2021 and then it takes time to produce enough doses for everyone. Plan that the virus won't vanish even though we hope it will.

9. Is hydroxychloroquine an acceptable treatment for COVID-19? Should we add it to our health insurance plans?

It is pure theory. It's a fairly safe drug but can cause serious heart problems in some people. Take on the advice of your doctor.

10. Team sports (soccer, gymnastics, baseball) are starting back up. Should I let my child participate?

It depends on the sport. Is there person-to-person contact? Are there any serious underlying conditions? I might question with those conditions.

11. Do we really need to sanitize our groceries?

There is no science that sanitizing groceries is necessary. I don't wipe my groceries down. Just be sure to wash your fruits and vegetables as you normally would.

12. We have an employee with an incurable cancer whom everyone else thinks should not be at work right now (note: no one has tested positive in the workplace) but he refuses to even wear a mask. If he catches COVID-19 at work and dies...is my company liable...because we allowed him to work knowing he had a compromised immune system?

I don't think so, but I'm not an attorney. I believe Congress is discussing liability protections.

13. Have we successfully flattened the curve?

Yes, we have flattened the curve in Kansas.

14. What resources should we be listening to/watching?

That's a tough one. I don't want to advertise. I would suggest you listen to the health department, your physician, and the CDC. News programs usually show the most sensational stories, so I'm reluctant to listen to them.

15. Why did the CDC originally say no to masks, but now they say yes? What changed?

We're learning more about the virus as we go. Masks do help even though they are not 100% protective.



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16. I watched PLANDEMIC on YouTube....is that for real? Is that lady doctor legit? Was this whole thing planned?

I haven't seen that but always look at who is providing the information and if there's a financial benefit for them. I encourage you to go to your health department, CDC, and your doctor for credible information.

17. If President Trumps letter to the WHO isn't taken seriously and he pulls support from the WHO, what does that mean for America? For the World? For me?

That seems to be a political discussion and I'm no expert in that field.

18. Our State and Federal legislators sure do like to tell us all what to do right now. We've implemented policies and processes at substantial time and cost to our organizations with very little, if any, lead time. Are they right? Is all that we're doing with CARES...the FFCRA (emergency paid FMLA, emergency paid sick leave, etc.) really in the best interest of everyone? How is the Federal government paying for these trillions of dollars that have been 'infused' into our society?

In general, I think the CDC is doing its best to try to protect us.

19. My sister wants to host a birthday party on Saturday with around 30 family members present. I told her this was a bad idea with the parties of 10 or fewer order from the Governor, but she thinks its fine since we can "space out". I don't want to be a party pooper. I miss my family too. But what is the actual likelihood that I, or my children, will contract COVID-19 at this party if no one has tested positive, no one is showing any symptoms, and everyone has basically been quarantined at home, by themselves the past 8 weeks?

Again, we don't have hard proof on things being recommended. I would question the ages of the kids and their ability to social distance/practice good hygiene, what county you're in, etc.

20. I work in an office building where I come into limited contact with co-workers and the occasional customer. Do I need to strip, wash with scalding hot water, and wash my clothing on high heat immediately upon returning home? Do I need to leave my shoes outside?

I don't think there's any need to do that. Health care workers in the ICU with COVID-19 patients practice those behaviors but I don't think they're necessary for the rest of us.

21. How long can this virus live on surfaces? Water, Paper, Plastic, Leather, Wood, etc.?

Emerging research shows that the virus can live on plastic for 2-3 days but we don't know if it's healthy enough to infect you. It can live on paper for 48 hours.

22. My boss is pretty lax about all of this. We haven't implemented any strict protocols, we do encourage social distancing, but it's hard to do in our line of work. We haven't provided masks. Are we in the wrong?

I would encourage social distancing, and masks are better than nothing.

23. Can you use too much hand sanitizer? It's like crack in our office...people can't get enough of it. We're constantly rubbing it on our hands.

Yes, but I don't know what too much is. I would encourage you wash your hands 2-3 times per day in addition to using hand sanitizer.

24. What is the proper percentage of alcohol for an effective hand sanitizer? Does Everclear really work?

Sanitizer with 60-70% ethanol. I believe Everclear is 100% so assume it would work.



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25. How do we get our employees to stop watching YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, etc. for their news? What resources should we be encouraging them to reference?

I believe that's an HR question.

26. Is there really talk of letting prisoners out of jail/prison early because of COVID-19? Out of fear for prisoner safety?

Yes, they are releasing some prisoners that are close to the end of their sentence and who committed low-level crimes.

27. Are we going to quarantine for every new virus now? Is THIS the “new normal”?

No, most viruses aren't lethal and this contagious.

28. How far away are we from having a vaccine? We've heard about hydroxychloroquine. And last night on the news they talked about 5 American Pharmaceutical companies working on a vaccine and one of them being close. Is that true?

I would say 2021 but we might get lucky.

29. Is this going to be like the flu shot – everyone is encouraged to get a COVID-19 shot?

Yes.

30. Can the government mandate that everyone get a vaccine? Or require employers to pay for it – no matter what the cost?

I don't know that the government can mandate it but they can certainly recommend it.

31. Is COVID-19 worse than the flu regarding total # of deaths?

Yes. And the two main differences between coronavirus and influenza are that we have greater immunity to the flu and medicines to treat it.

32. You once mentioned in a meeting – I think it was a Sedgwick County Commission meeting – that the economic fallout from this virus was going to be worse than the virus itself. Do you still think that is true?

I don't recall saying that. We need to be smart about it and shut things down if it does get out of control. If we have to shut things down because we didn't keep it under control behaviorally (with social distancing, hand washing, and masks), then the economy could get worse than the virus.

33. Is Kansas ready for a second round of this virus?

If people don't make the suggested behavioral changes, the curve could start to rise again as we return to work or as school resumes. Kids aren't in the higher risk category but are known for spreading viruses. Our fear is that school will resume and we'll see more adult cases that fill the hospitals back up. We need to keep the spread minimal.

34. If an employee comes to work with a fever and is sent home, we originally thought they could return to work once they were 24-hour fever free. Now I am hearing at least 3 days or 10 days since onset. What's the current recommendation?

The recommendation is that you don't return until 10 days after the start of symptoms or 3 days after symptoms are gone, whichever is the longest. Be sure to consult with your health care provider.

35. I have heard there are some people who may have a natural genetic immunity to coronaviruses. Is there a scientific basis for that?

Not that I am aware of.



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36. What is your feeling on opening swimming pools?

Pools dilute the virus themselves, but we don't need a group of kids failing to social distance. I am not opposed as long as good judgment is exercised.

37. What are the virus tracing efforts?

More tracers are hired and trained so every positive case is traced by contacts and then the tracers reached out to those that were exposed.

38. Can we require doctor's notes to return to work since as an employer we may not know if the employee was out due to influenza or COVID?

Assuming it is someone that is infected, and they are beyond the 10-day/3-day timeline and want to return to work, I would be happy to give them a note. As far as requiring it, I believe that is an HR question. Keep in mind that many people are asymptomatic.