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NEWS RELEASE

Alabama pediatricians adapting care during COVID-19, offer guidance to parents

Pediatricians across Alabama are, like most healthcare providers, adapting to continuing care in the middle of a pandemic. To address the safety and health of its families, primary care pediatricians have changed protocols for triaging and providing well and sick visits, instituted new practice guidelines for providing care via telehealth, and taken to social media now more than ever to communicate to their patients and families about the importance of staying healthy.

“The COVID-19 pandemic poses challenges to our healthcare, economic, and social systems unlike anything we have ever experienced in our lifetimes. The social distancing orders have caused a significant decline in primary care visits,” said Wes Stubblefield, MD, FAAP, President of the Alabama Chapter-American Academy of Pediatrics. “My colleagues that I have spoken with are experiencing decreases of 50-80% of their normal patient visit volumes, even with the use of telehealth, and many of them have had to furlough staff.”

Pediatricians are adapting, however, with measures such as:

- Maintaining specific hours to see patients for well child visits, many practices are seeing children during their morning hours for well child visits, while only seeing sick visits during the afternoon appointments.
- Meeting patients in the parking lot of the practice, pediatric practice staff go to the vehicle with a screening form and a sanitized pen. Once patients complete the forms, staff will come get the forms and deliver it to the front desk staff. Patients will wait in their vehicles until an exam room becomes available.
- Allowing only one caregiver to accompany a child into the exam room, practices are especially encouraging that the caregiver not be a grandparent due to their increased risks for illness.
- Cleaning and disinfecting exam rooms between patients.

Alabama pediatricians also want to provide families in Alabama with these guidelines to assure their children’s continued health:

- Maintain consistent care with your child’s own doctor; your pediatrician is providing telehealth – allowing you to talk to a doctor via telephone or secure video - so that you can stay at home and get care when needed; this will reduce everyone’s risk of exposure. These visits are similar to office visits. **Avoid using services such as Teladoc – use your own doctor, who has your history and can provide the best care for your child!**
- If your child is sick or you need to make an appointment, please call the office (do not show up without an appointment) and they will triage your care.
- Keep your appointments; simply call ahead to assure the steps you need to take. It is very important that your child be seen for regular vaccinations that are critical for his overall health and well-being.
- Most practices are limiting adults/other family members accompanying the child to one person (no grandparents). If your child has a well visit scheduled and develops a fever, please call to reschedule.
- If your child is showing symptoms and has been exposed to someone with COVID-19, please call your pediatrician’s office for instructions about where they can be tested.
- While some offices are doing COVID -19 testing, many are not. Please understand that pediatricians are following very strict protocols from the CDC and the Alabama Department of Public Health on who should be tested and this information may change as pediatricians receive new guidance.
- Understand that in some communities, your pediatrician’s office may have stricter guidelines for in-office visits due to local COVID-19 prevalence.

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