

6/16/2020 Update

* At the advice of the CDC and the American Academy of Family Physicians, our office is using telemedicine visits via video chat as often as possible in order to protect our patients, staff and community. If your medical concerns can be addressed adequately without an in-office visit, we will encourage online or phone visits when you call to make your appointment.

* **We are once again seeing patients in the office for physicals and other non-urgent needs that can't be addressed via virtual visit.** We are taking many precautions to ensure the safety of all who come into our office. We are not using our waiting area, limiting the number of patients in the building to allow adequate spacing, masking all patients and employees, performing daily temperature checks and twice-monthly COVID testing on all employees, and routinely cleaning and disinfecting the office.

* For those patients who need to be seen in person, we will ask you to wait in your car until an exam room is ready. Call our office at (607) 387-5707 when you have arrived to check in. All of our patients will be asked to wear a mask during their visit if they are able to tolerate it. Please wear a mask from home if you have one available to you. If you do need to wait for your appointment indoors, we have rearranged our waiting area to provide adequate spacing between patients and have removed toys and reading materials. We will move patients to private exam rooms as quickly as we are able.

* We will evaluate those with respiratory illness first via phone or virtual visit. For those who need to be seen in person, there is a dedicated section of our office with a separate entrance. Patients with respiratory illness should not use the front door. Upon arrival, please park in the lot to the left of the building. Call the front office (607-387-5707) to check in. A staff member will retrieve you when an exam room is available and you will be given a mask to wear during your visit. This back entrance does currently require patients to climb 3 stairs. If you are unable to do so, a staff member will meet you with a mask at the front door and escort you to the appropriate exam area.

* If you currently have a fever, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, fever, chills, sore throat, muscle pains, or a new loss of taste or smell, behave as if you have COVID-19 even without confirmation and stay home and self-isolate unless you need medical care. Patients who have severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, should seek care immediately. Older patients and individuals who have underlying medical conditions or who have problems with their immune system should contact us early in the course of their illness. Outside of emergency situations, you should make every effort to contact any healthcare facilities before arrival so they can prepare for your arrival.

The CDC has issued guidance on what to do if you are sick and believe you may have COVID-19, including instructions for when it is safe to discontinue your home isolation:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>

* There is a drive through sampling site at 40 Catherwood Rd. where community members can be tested for active COVID-19 infection, Monday through Friday between 8:30am-4pm and Saturday from 8:30am-12:30pm. No physician referral is needed to be tested. Tompkins County residents are encouraged to get tested based on the following guidelines:

- 1) Have had a recent onset of symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, or body aches.
- 2) Have been in the same room with a person confirmed positive with COVID-19 in the last 14 days.

- 3) Were advised by the Tompkins County Health Department to be tested, such as those in a retail store where a worker tested positive.
- 4) Are a worker where diagnostic testing is a requirement, request or recommendation when returning to your workplace during Phased re-opening.
- 5) Any individual who attended any of the recent protests across the state.
- 6) As recommended by a primary care provider.

You are asked to register before visiting the site. All testing is free for New Yorkers, regardless of health insurance. For more information:

<https://cayugahealthsystem.org/>
Call Center for Assistance: 607-319-5708

Those who are tested will be under in-home isolation until released by the Tompkins County Health Department.

* COVID-19 antibody testing is now available to certain populations. To qualify, you must not currently or within the past 14 days have had fever, cough, trouble breathing, or muscle aches or known exposure to a positive COVID-19 patient without wearing protective equipment. Priority for testing is known recovered COVID-19 patients who may be able to donate plasma to treat actively ill patients or those who were highly suspicious (but never confirmed) suspected COVID cases. There is some capacity to provide antibody testing for essential workers. A positive test result would indicate prior exposure/infection with some immune response to the novel coronavirus. For this test to be reliable, you must have a normally functioning immune system, as those with compromised immune systems might not develop detectable antibodies. Contact our office if you believe you are a candidate for antibody testing.

* NY State currently requires everyone to wear a simple face covering to prevent germ sharing in places where social distancing is difficult (grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.). The mask is an additional public health measure and should not replace social distancing and avoiding unnecessary outings. The main function of the mask is to prevent the wearer from sharing their germs and should not be considered protective. Wearers must be careful not to touch their faces while putting on or wearing a face mask. Cloth masks should not be worn by children under 2 or by those who have difficulty breathing. Please do not use surgical masks or N-95 respirators, as these are in short supply and are needed by healthcare workers and first responders. For more guidance on face coverings, please visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

* **DON'T QUIT WHILE WE ARE AHEAD!** Things have been going well in attempts to control the COVID-19 outbreak locally in Tompkins and the surrounding counties. This is a result of extensive COVID testing as well as careful social isolation by a majority of residents. There is a new danger at this point- as we all become used to the idea of living in a pandemic, there is a tendency to want to return to normal ways of living. However, if this is not done carefully there is a real risk of having a second outbreak much worse than the first and having to return to stricter public health measures and shutdowns again.

The NY State government has been issuing guidelines regularly on what sort of activities are safe moving forward. Some things that were previously off the table, such as social gatherings of less than 25 people, are now permitted as long as individuals socially distance and wear masks. Congregating outdoors also decreases risk of transmission.

This does not mean things can fully return to normal. In our usual healthy and social lifestyle it is very easy for a respiratory virus to spread. This means that if one case is brought in from outside, it could quickly work its way through the community via person-to-person spread.

If we all change our behavior (social distancing of at least 6 feet, wearing masks, and avoiding unnecessary gatherings) to make that transmission more difficult, then that imported case is not able to spread quickly enough to new hosts, and the infection fizzles out. We don't have to live in isolation bubbles, but if we can get the average rate of transmission to a little less than half of what it would be normally, the infection will not be able to spread.

Large gatherings, and any size gathering without proper precautions are still a major risk. This is because of the number of people carrying the virus with no symptoms who are capable of spreading it. In one of these situations, it would be easy to spread the virus to many new carriers, and things can quickly get out of control.

Social activities are very important, and they will happen again one of these days. There are very specific guidelines already for when this can happen. But at this point, for the sake of the members of our community who are most vulnerable, it's not yet time to go back to normal. Our advice is to continue to follow social distancing and masking guidelines, and follow the evolving public health guidance for when it is acceptable to relax those requirements. Recommendations for our county can be found here:

<https://tompkinscountyny.gov/health>

* On a less clinical note, we realize that this is a time of great anxiety and uncertainty for our community. We encourage you to find ways to nurture your own wellness. Summer is a great time to explore the natural beauty of our area on hiking trails and in our parks, and outdoor play is an excellent option as long as you socially distance or wear masks when that is not possible. We are all in this together and we will get through these challenging times. We have already accomplished so much together!

Current information and recommendations on the novel coronavirus/COVID-19 can found here:

Tompkins County Health Department: <https://tompkinscountyny.gov/health>

New York State Department of Health: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/home>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Cough Etiquette

- Use a tissue to cover your mouth and nose every single time you cough or sneeze. (Resort to coughing into your elbow if a tissue is not available. Never cough into your hands or open air.)
- Always turn your face away from people around you when coughing or sneezing.
- Place your used tissue immediately in the trash can.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or, if unable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 to 95% alcohol after you cough or sneeze.