

Stats show your family is safer than you might think

By JENNIFER COLTON

Press coverage and social media about COVID-19 tends to pay the most attention to the hardest-hit areas and the worst cases. But, for young families in Oregon, how dangerous is it really?

"We know the risks of complications are lower for kids, the risks are low for most people," says Joseph Fiumara, director of Umatilla County Public Health. "About 80 percent (have) minor symptoms if they're symptomatic at all." That doesn't mean we have nothing to worry about, but the risks are much less for healthy children and parents under 40.

As of April 26, the Oregon Health Authority reports 2,345 Oregonians had tested positive for COVID-19; only 58 of those cases – 2.5 percent – were 19 or younger. Of those, only four had been hospitalized.

These figures may change as testing expands, but the trend holds worldwide that older populations are harder hit. Looking at the latest Oregon Health Authority figures, 12 percent of the cases were in those 20 to 29, and 16 percent were in their 30s; only 21 cases (20s) and 33 cases (30s) needed hospital care. There were no deaths under age 40. In contrast, 50 percent of COVID-19 patients 80 and older were hospitalized.

Nationwide, the numbers are similar. The CDC reported 23,358 total deaths in the U.S. from COVID-19 on April 23: three were children 14 and younger; 21 were age 15 to 24, and 183 were reported in those from 25 to 34. For comparison, 78 children age 14 and younger died of influenza during the same time period.

So if children and young adults

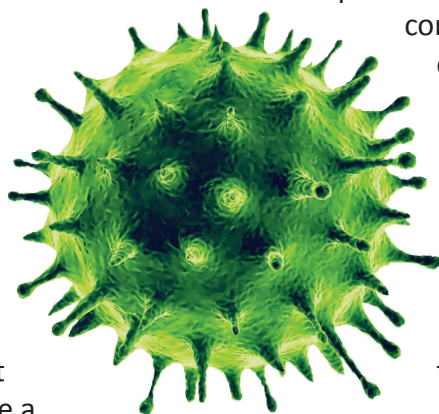
are less likely to get hit hard by the virus, does this mean stay-at-home and social distancing restrictions should be lifted for young families? Not so fast.

"Just because the risk is low doesn't mean you can't be a carrier," Fiumara points out. After the recent COVID-19 outbreak on the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier, the entire crew of nearly 5,000 young sailors was tested. Of the 950+ who tested positive, about half showed no symptoms. That means a lot of people who think they're healthy may actually be contagious.

Oregon's current health safety measures are mostly to protect older citizens and those with health issues, says Fiumara, "because we know the mortality rate in those high-risk groups is relatively high." Individuals with underlying health conditions, people over the age of 60, and those in settings such as nursing homes are more susceptible.

When speaking with concerned families, local health providers say they rely on information from Umatilla County Health, OHA, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. On the COVID-19 page of healthychildren.org, the AAP points to early research that fewer children than adults have symptoms or are hospitalized, but "severe illness has been reported in children, most often in infants less than a year."

The AAP also states, in bold,



that if your child has been exposed to COVID-19 or you are concerned about your child's symptoms, call your pediatrician immediately. It has guidelines for how to care for someone in the family with COVID-19 and how to talk to kids about the pandemic.

To protect families, the AAP recommends:

- Hand washing for at least 20 seconds
- Reducing close physical contact with others
- Coughing or sneezing into a tissue or their elbow
- Teaching children to avoid touching their faces



Family Health

- Cleaning and disinfecting homes
- Washing toys

That advice falls right in line with CDC recommendations and the local messages from Oregon Health Authority and Umatilla County Health.

A lot of things have changed with this virus, says Fiumara, "but not what public health has been saying for decades: wash your hands, cover your cough, and stay home when you're sick."

Jennifer Colton is news director of KOHU and KQFM, and mother of three, based in Pendleton.

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