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Are You Ready to Come Out Now?

Warm weather is here, which ideally would coincide with ending the coronavirus restrictions that have kept us isolated for well over a year. Are you ready to come out now?

Many of us aren't, which isn't surprising given the ever-changing facts: It's OK to take your mask off/no, keep wearing your mask. It's time to go out for a restaurant meal/restaurants are still limited in the number of diners they can allow. More than half the popula-

tion has now been vaccinated/many younger people are refusing the vaccine. And therein lies the complication in returning all of us to normal life: those who don't want the vaccine.

Imagine my shock when I called the medical practice the day before my annual physical to ask whether all employees had been vaccinated. "No," said the cheerful man who answered the phone. "We're not required to get it."

I brought this up when I saw my doctor. To his credit, he didn't try to lie to me. Why, inquiring minds wanted to know, in a medical setting with sick people in and out all day, didn't they require employees, especially the ones who get close enough to breathe on patients, to get the vaccine? Because, the doctor said, if they are required to take the vaccine, too many of them would just quit and the medical practice would have to shut down.

It seems to me that ad-

vice from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local governments varies by the day. But we still need to wear masks. We still need to distance ourselves from people, stay out of crowds and avoid poorly ventilated spaces.

To my way of thinking only one thing has really changed: the weather. It's time to get out and walk, get some sunshine, build leg muscles and admire the neighbors' flowers. Wear a hat.

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Help With COVID Funeral Expenses

No one wants to think about it, but it's a fact of life. People are dying of COVID. They're leaving behind families that, in many cases, are already struggling with financial worries. Add in the cost of a funeral, and many will need help.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is stepping in with funding. Under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, FEMA is offering


financial assistance for funeral expenses incurred after Jan. 20, 2020. FEMA has started an assistance phone line (844-684-6333) that's open Monday-Friday, 9am-9pm ET. Its representatives will help get applications completed. The call will take about 20 minutes, so they can get all the details right. Have all your information in front of you before you call.

Once you're given an application number, you'll need to send supporting documentation to FEMA, typically by fax or mail. To learn more, go to the FEMA website: www.fema.gov. Scroll down the front page to the item dated April 12, 2021, Funeral Assistance FAQ.

There are a number of criteria to see if you're qualified for help. You must be a U.S. citizen, noncitizen national or qualified alien. You must be the one who paid the funeral expenses. Funeral homes cannot call for you. If several of you contributed to the expenses, tell them at FEMA, but typi-

cally there needs to be one application. There are a number of categories of funeral expense that might be covered, including headstone, casket, clergy services and more.

A warning: Scammers are always looking for the next way to con people out of money. Now they're calling people (possibly those who were listed in funeral notices) and offering to help fill out the applications for assistance. Don't fall for it. FEMA is not going to call you.

David Debysingh, R.Ph. Mike Hankins, R.Ph.

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What You Can Do About Rising Food Prices

According to the Consumer Price Index, food prices from one year ago have gone up 3.3%. It's not going to stop there. Non-food prices are going up as well, as companies struggle to find the raw materials and manpower they need to produce everything else.

Fitness equipment, furniture, lumber, gas, electronics -- it's all going up. What we have to be concerned with, however, is our most basic need: food.

Even if you've never felt any urgency before, check into your local food bank. Keep the information handy, just in case you need it later.

Look at store brands. Many are even better than the name brands.

Make every dollar count. Sign up for a grocery store rewards card, if it's available. Use a private throwaway email address, the one you use to sign up for things that might generate too much junk mail.

You'll likely get emails about sales with coupons. (At my store, I log in at the checkout and get cash back at the end of each quarter.)

Look to your own vegetable garden or farmers markets as ways to save. If you want to do canning this summer, one heads up: Be certain you can get the jars, lids and rings at the same time. They might be in short supply.

Freezing meals is another option and ensures that food is always available. Double a stew or soup recipe and buy in bulk when it makes sense to.

Shop from a list to the extent you can, knowing that stores can be out of things you want. Consider having breakfast for dinner one night a week, and one meatless dinner. Plan meals around what's on sale each week.

It bears repeating: Find out about your local food bank.

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