

Open letter to Rapid City and South Dakota state government and public health officials on the need to more rapidly implement strategies to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is an unprecedented time. We face the COVID-19 pandemic that will challenge every single one of us. While we appreciate the tireless efforts of those involved in managing this crisis, it falls short of what we feel will make a true impact.

Throughout the world, the most effective responses to the historic threat of COVID-19 have come from state and local governments. Using that history as evidence, we must shut down all unnecessary travel and utilize social distancing and self-isolation to stop the spread of the disease. Failing to heed warnings will lead to an exponential spread and will incapacitate our local healthcare system resulting in deaths. We will face an overwhelming flood of patients requiring intensive care and ventilator support. Death rates for those over the age of 70 is over 8% and for those over 80, approaches 15%. Using even conservative estimates, ventilator and intensive care beds will be exceeded. Supply lines are limited and will quickly be diminished. Waiting to act will kill more people while taking aggressive action now will help to limit the severity of this pandemic and allow the system to serve those most in need. Based on a recent Harvard study, the Rapid City area could experience 40,000 sick, 8000 hospitalized, and 400 requiring a ventilator (*we have fewer than 80 ventilators in Rapid City). Untold will die. We must protect those most vulnerable in our community.

Therefore, we the physicians of the Black Hills, advocate implementing **all** of the following:

1. Self-isolate at home except for essential needs and practice social distancing;
2. Stop non-essential travel: most importantly airline and public transportation;
3. Close non-essential businesses: restaurants and other facilities that prepare and serve food (except for take-away), bars, salons, retail stores, clubs, gyms, schools, daycares, social events, and churches;
4. Conserve medical supplies;
5. Limit nonessential healthcare operations.

Crucial mitigation strategies, prompt intervention, and our remote location offer us a unique opportunity to stop the disease. We recognize that many of these interventions are already front of mind for our government; but our public officials also face competing priorities including concerns about the economic, political, and social impact of these measures. The balance of those concerns is greatly outweighed by the health and safety risk facing our community and our responsibility to those most vulnerable among us. Now is the time to take further action. You must not hesitate; we need decisive action now.

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