

# Louisa Life

June 5, 2020 • ONE COPY FREE



**COVID-19**

**Brings Radical  
Shifts to Life**

**Visiting the Elderly During the Pandemic**

**Louisa Family Practice: Dr. Rex Harkrader M.D. Talks About COVID-19**

A monthly publication

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Visiting through the looking glass is Joyce Kutsche who lives in assisted living at English Meadows in Louisa. Photo by Carol Barfield.  
Cover designed by Marilyn Ellinger

# COVID-19

*Brings Radical Shifts to Life*

## Milestones, Millstones and a Visit with an M.D.

By Carol Barfield  
Correspondent

**T**here are milestones that cause radical shifts in our life: birth, acquiring speech and mobility, starting school, graduating and heading out into the world, finding a special someone to love, and having a child, to name a few. Then the unpleasant shifts can occur...the loss of a job, divorce, the illness or death of a loved one, economic distress, and more unusually, wars and pandemics. For us right now, the paradigm shift has come with the entrance of the COVID-19 virus into our reality.

Speaking personally, the low-level anxiety constantly present is exhausting, like a millstone around the neck. Trying to sift through the recommendations and changing opinions in the news is confounding. All types of contributors are thinking out loud and some seem to have prejudices and political motivations which muddy the waters. Experts with the WHO and CDC seem to have been discredited, which does not help in understanding the crisis. Our minds accurately perceive the crisis as life-threatening, which causes us to be mentally busy sifting through too many variables, trying to decide what to pay attention to. Even if we just give up on trying to parse is all out, a low level of anxiety still thrums through our subconscious, disturbing mood and sleep. For every logic thread you try to follow through, you come upon a brick wall. The danger in giving up on the process is that if you throw your hands up and stop caring, you could be moving yourselves, your loved ones and your community closer to the danger zone.

Children of all ages are also susceptible to the emotional ramifications of the anxiety they witness in adults. Our three-year old granddaughter marched around her parents as they were on their computers trying to work from home singing, "Coronavirus, coronavirus, if you mess up it's coronavirus!" Both of her older siblings have asked more than once where their 93-year old great-grandmother is, who used to visit often. Now we are only allowed to see her through the glass of her assisted living facility, talking via iPad. She hasn't been hugged since the lockdown began. Our twelve-year old grandson who lives in Virginia Beach spends way too much time as an only child alone in his room, as do many other children across the country. Our newly teenage grandson has tapered his Facetime with friends down to a trickle. "There's just nothing new to say," he comments. The team basketball he so enjoyed has mor-



Dr. Rex Harkrader. Photo by Lakey Harkrader.

phed to dribbling and shooting alone. No band trip at the end of the 8th grade year, which he has been looking forward to since he started playing trumpet three years ago. Chores, virtual schoolwork and being on their devices can only soak up so much of the clock. Some parents cringe at the amount of time their children are playing video games, but kids talk to their friends while they play which is often their only way of being with their peers—no play dates, no school dances, no biking or going out with friends, and no clear idea of an endpoint.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could go to a trusted friend who would have our best interests in mind, like Dr. Marcus Welby of my time, or Gregory House, or Shawn Murphy of the *The Good Doctor*, and have a little one-on-one discussion to help us figure the medical side of this out?

At Louisa Family Practice in Louisa, Virginia, Dr. Rex Harkrader, who has been in practice for 25 years, became

that medical professional for the purposes of this interview. **Understanding that any true medical questions should be taken directly to your own physician, here is one medical professional's take on the current situation facing us.**

**Can someone who wants a coronavirus test get one?**

Yes, but with qualifications. In the absence of symptoms, I hesitate to administer a test because it is more likely to be negative. I do tests on people with classic symptoms. My ears perk up when I hear of fever, cough, shortness of breath and chest discomfort. At our office, we are provided a certain number of tests to use supplied on the basis of need. Areas that have a lot of positives receive more test kits. If we have to test more often because there are more cases cropping up, we get more tests.

See COVID-19 Page 4



During the pandemic: The staff of Louisa Family Practice with doctors Dr. Alger "Al" Southall and Dr. Rex Harkrader. Photo by Lakey Harkrader.

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FIND COVID-19 TESTING NEAR YOU:

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## COVID-19 from page 2

### Are there other reasons you might decide to test?

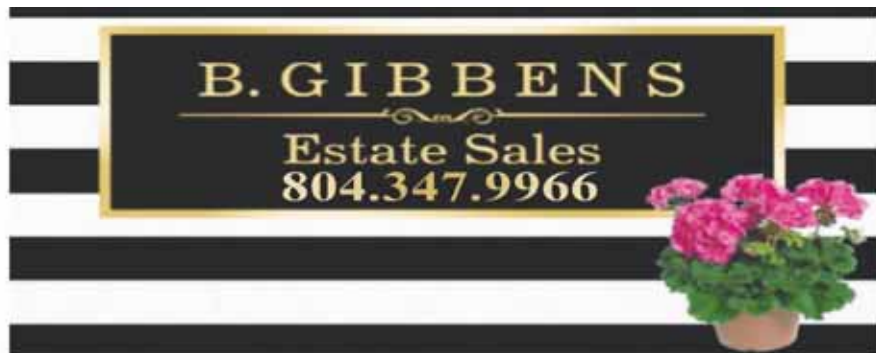
I look at exposure and social history. True exposure is being in close proximity without a mask to an infected person—as an example, two feet away from someone for half an hour. If a person is following guidelines, social distancing, wearing a mask and following good hygiene, the chances are reduced for transmission.

### Several of us imagine we may have already had the virus. Lots of people have had a sniffle here, a sore throat there or a cough. How do you know when symptoms are concerning?

With allergies there is no fever; you have nasal symptoms like runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes and scratchy throat, and you often get it every year. With COVID-19, you often have fever, cough, shortness of breath and chest pressure. A smaller number of cases have a sore throat and/or runny nose.

### I've seen and heard of how painful the test can be. How is it really?

The old test was uncomfortable. The nasal swab used to reach 4" up the nostril. Now we just do a swab of the throat, like a strep test with a Q-tip on the tonsils and back of the throat. Then the swab is placed in a liquid medium



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and transported to the lab.

**Does insurance cover the procedure?**

We are sending the charges to the insurance company. Initially the government said all testing would be covered. They may cover it, then reimburse the insurance company; we are not certain yet.

**How accurate are the tests?**

It's hard to be completely confident because the tests are not yet FDA-approved. One of our patients came in with a fever and tested negative. The fever continued throughout the week and the second time he was tested he

showed positive. A negative test can provide false assurance.

**What's the difference between a COVID-19 test and an antibody test?**

The antibody test is a blood test that shows if you have had the virus. It is not covered by insurance and costs around \$150. I am not sure how the resulting information would be beneficial. There are many unknowns about this virus.

**What about the asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19?**

It is a concern. A patient we saw who

*See COVID -19 page 6*



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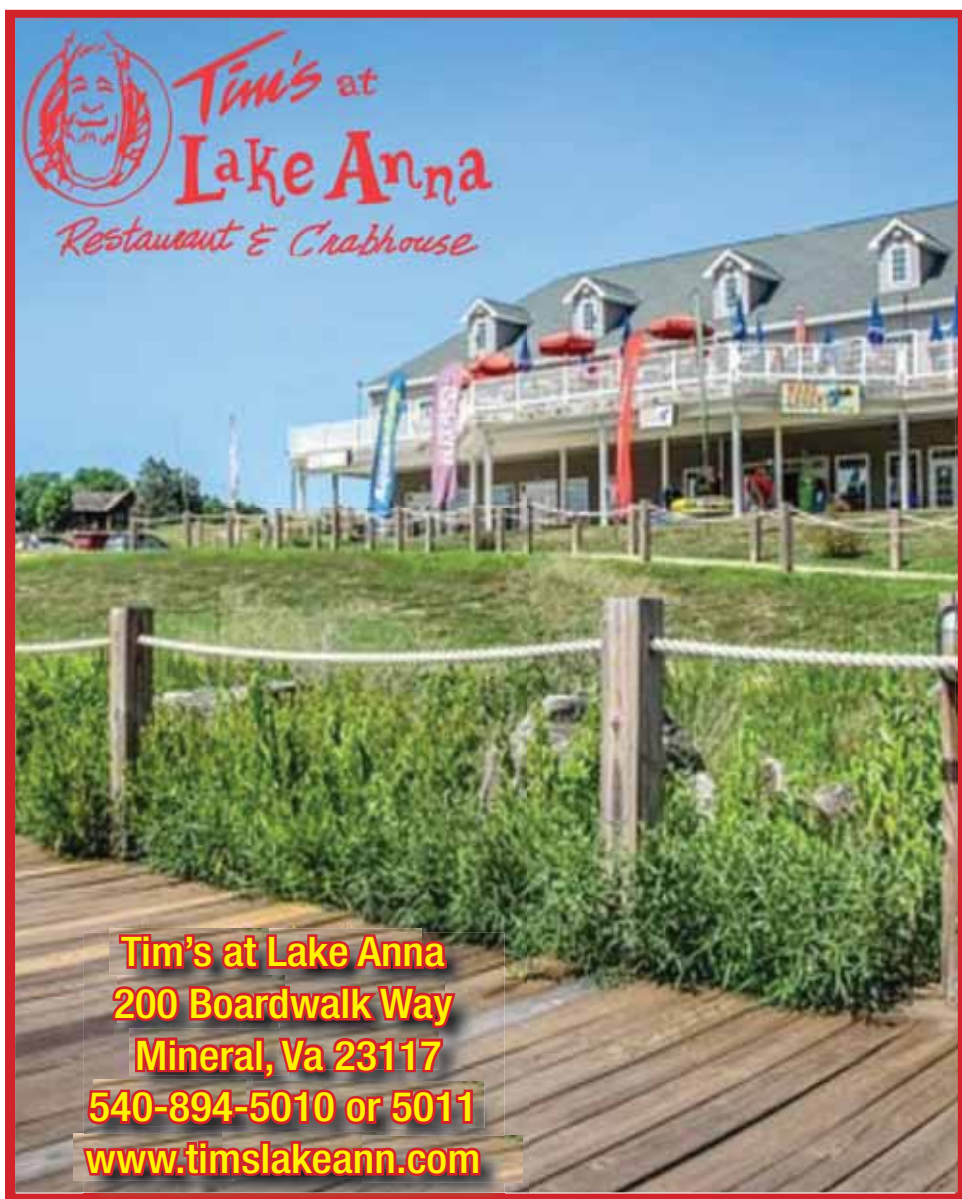
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Joyce Kutsche is the mother of writer Carol Barfield.  
Photo by Carol Barfield.

had a fever and tested positive for the virus infected a family member. The family member also tested positive but did not experience any symptoms.

**Should we be worried here in Louisa?**

COVID-19 is a real disease. It can be a threat to a small portion of the population. In Louisa, it is at a low level so far. Out of approximately 38,000 cases in the state of Virginia, there have been 61 local cases since February, which is a low number. We have had only two over the past week (the interview occurred May 21). There have been nine hospitalizations of patients coming from Louisa and zero deaths.

**Do you wear a mask?**

Yes, I wear a mask due to my exposure to the public in my occupation. Wearing a mask is a courtesy and protects other people. It is especially important to wear one if you have coughing or respiratory symptoms. If you are in the population that is at higher risk due to age and other health problems, additional care should be taken to avoid exposure.

**It seems like there are other problems from staying shutdown for so long.**

Yes, it's been reasonable what has been done so far. We have avoided the peak and saved hospitals from being inundated. But there are adverse side effects secondary to the virus. Declining mental health, domestic abuse and the abuse of alcohol are some concerns that can arise from continued isolation. Maybe it is time to move cautiously forward again.

**So you think we are doing pretty well here?**

The downward slope, I hope, will continue. The rate of new infections is decreasing, and I am optimistic that this trend will continue, especially in this area, and that it will be safe to start a return to public life.

\*\*\*\*\*

Few of us really think that we will return to our former life rapidly. Some changes will be long-standing, others permanent. Accepting the changes, adjusting, and not allowing sadness and fear to overwhelm you are important goals to strive for. If you have concerns, arrange an appointment with your own doctor, some of whom have telephone and virtual appointment options.

While teaching music to my eight-year old granddaughter, we worked on the Christmas carol "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas." At one point, she turned to me and said, "This reminds me of the virus and how we will feel when it's all over." Then she read me the words:

*"Here we are as in  
olden days,  
happy golden days of yore.  
Faithful friends who are  
dear to us  
gather near to us once more.  
Through the years we all will  
be together, if the fates  
allow..."*

Best wishes and best health to you in these changing times.

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The Mineral Farmer's Market is open Saturdays through October from 8:00 AM to 1:00 pm with some important logistical changes. At this time there are no plans for a Tuesday mini-market this year.

Our farmer's market has been considered by Governor Northam to be a vital link in the local food chain, and will be allowed to remain open to the public even as the statewide "Stay at Home" executive order is in place. This simply means our customers must treat visiting our market as a necessary trip to a grocery store, not a social occasion.

We will have clearly marked signage on the field to remind you to practice "social distancing" and to make your visit brief.

We invite you to follow our facebook page on Fridays before Market for an updated list of vendors and to see what's available, so you can best plan your trip.



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### Press Release

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To accommodate traffic on the dead-end road, crews will construct a temporary road adjacent to the bridge.

Motorists should expect construction activities starting May 26. The new bridge will open to traffic in late September.

The existing Route 603 bridge was built in 1982 and is considered structurally deficient with a posted weight restriction. After construction, the bridge will be open to all legal-weight vehicles.

For more information about Virginia's bridges and VDOT's bridge inspection program, including current conditions of the state's bridges, FAQs and video of a bridge inspection, visit VDOT's website, <http://www.virginiadot.org/info/Bridge.asp>.

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