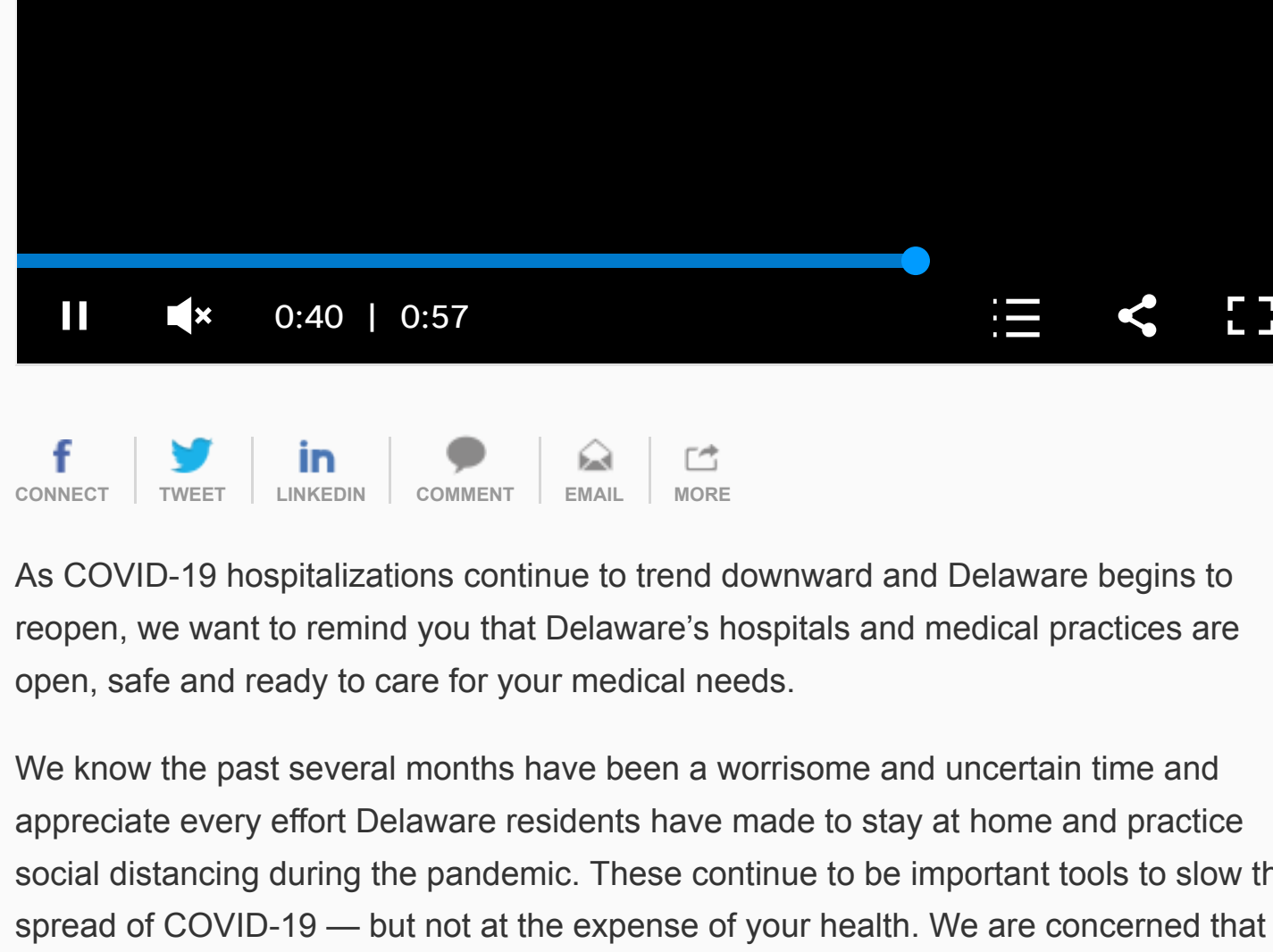


OPINION

Delaware, your hospitals and medical providers are open, safe and ready to care for you (Opinion)

Wayne A. Smith and Mark B. Thompson, Special to the USA TODAY NETWORK Published 5:00 a.m. ET June 2, 2020

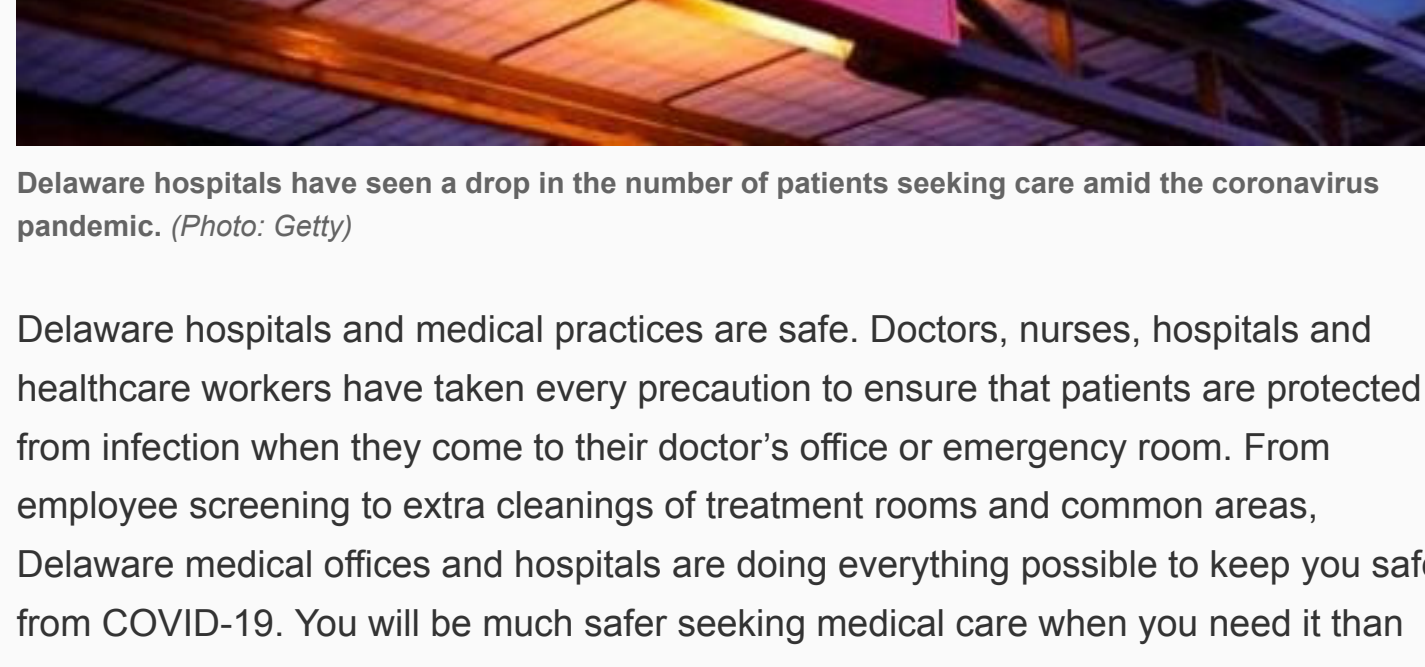


As COVID-19 hospitalizations continue to trend downward and Delaware begins to reopen, we want to remind you that Delaware's hospitals and medical practices are open, safe and ready to care for your medical needs.

We know the past several months have been a worrisome and uncertain time and appreciate every effort Delaware residents have made to stay at home and practice social distancing during the pandemic. These continue to be important tools to slow the spread of COVID-19 — but not at the expense of your health. We are concerned that many Delawareans have delayed seeking medical treatment because of COVID-19.

According to a new Kaiser Family Foundation poll, 48% of Americans said they or a family member has skipped or delayed medical care because of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the poll, 11% of those individuals said the condition of the person who did not seek medical attention worsened as a result of the delayed care.

Don't let fear of COVID-19 keep you from getting the medical care you need.



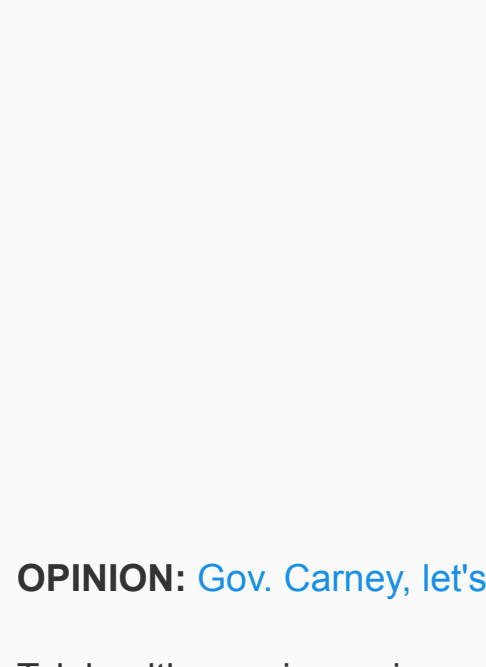
Delaware hospitals have seen a drop in the number of patients seeking care amid the coronavirus pandemic. (Photo: Getty)

Delaware hospitals and medical practices are safe. Doctors, nurses, hospitals and healthcare workers have taken every precaution to ensure that patients are protected from infection when they come to their doctor's office or emergency room. From employee screening to extra cleanings of treatment rooms and common areas, Delaware medical offices and hospitals are doing everything possible to keep you safe from COVID-19. You will be much safer seeking medical care when you need it than delaying care and letting your injury or illness worsen.

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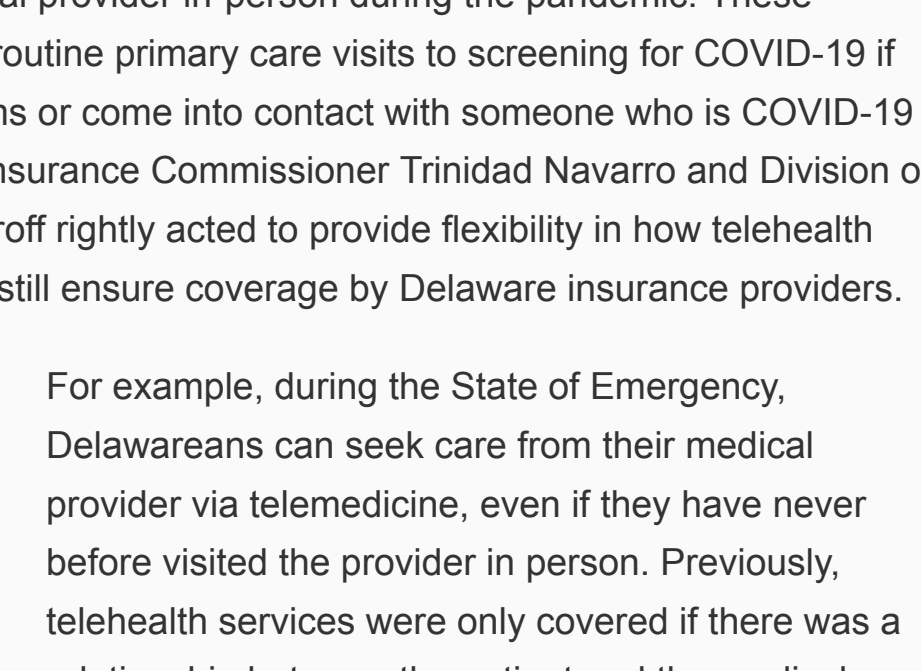
Delaware hospitals and medical practices are open. While many non-critical surgeries and procedures were canceled during the height of the pandemic to make room for COVID-19 patients, steady decreases in COVID-19 hospitalizations have allowed elective and non-urgent services to resume.

Delaware Division of Public Health Director Dr. Karyl Rattay announced guidance, effective May 20, for the safe resumption of certain elective and non-urgent medical procedures and appointments. Examples of these services include pediatric vaccinations, early child care, and management of existing medical or behavioral health conditions. Other services (including routine primary care visits) as prioritized by the health care facility or medical practice may also resume as long as safeguards, such as a two-week supply of personal protective equipment, are in place.



Mark B. Thompson (Photo: Submitted)

Just as it is critical not to delay seeking medical care for an illness or injury that could get worse over time, it is also important to keep up with regular preventative care. Primary care allows for both preventative care and early identification and treatment of multiple chronic conditions that otherwise may result in costly and debilitating outcomes. Recent declines in hospitalizations, coupled with possibility that the spread of COVID-19 may lessen this summer signals that now is a good time to get the care you need, particularly as some experts are forecasting a second wave of COVID-19 this fall.



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Telehealth remains an important component for providing medical care to those who are unable to visit their medical provider in-person during the pandemic. These services can be provided for routine primary care visits to screening for COVID-19 if you have developed symptoms or come into contact with someone who is COVID-19 positive. Gov. John Carney, Insurance Commissioner Trinidad Navaro and Division of Medicaid Director Stephen Groff rightly acted to provide flexibility in how telehealth services may be delivered to still ensure coverage by Delaware insurance providers.

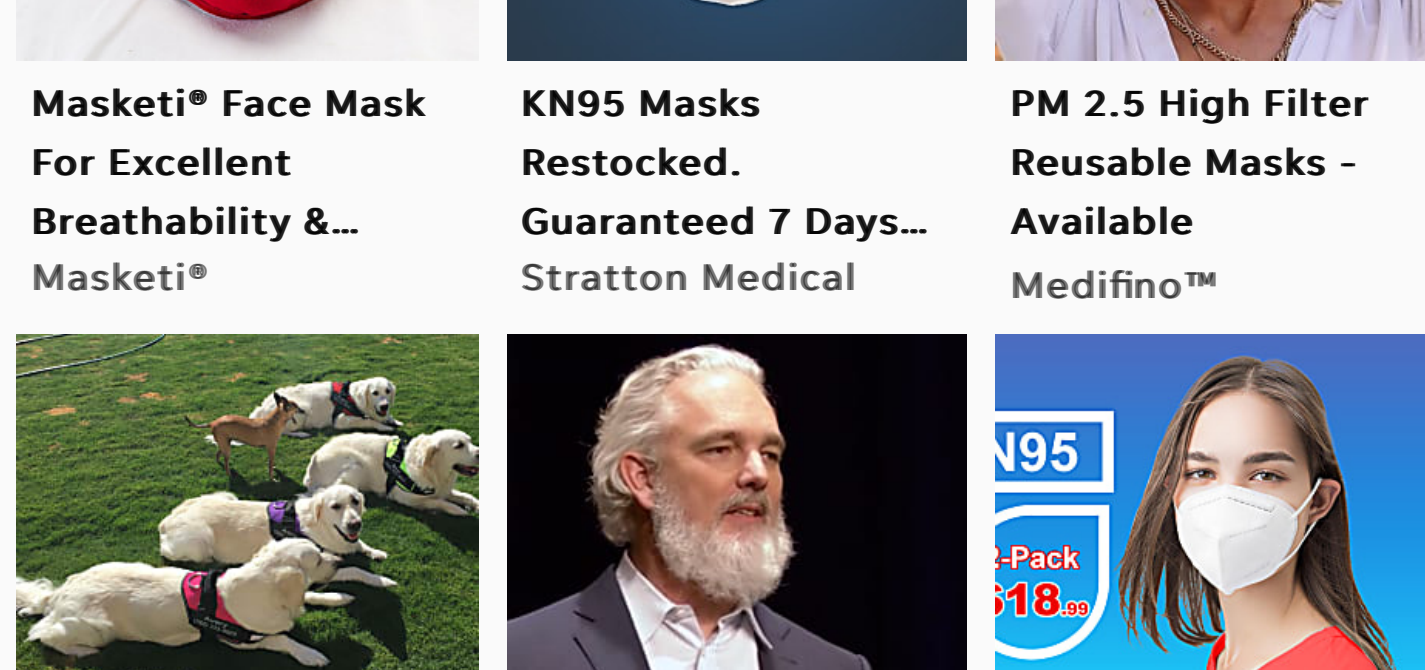


Wayne A. Smith (Photo: Submitted)

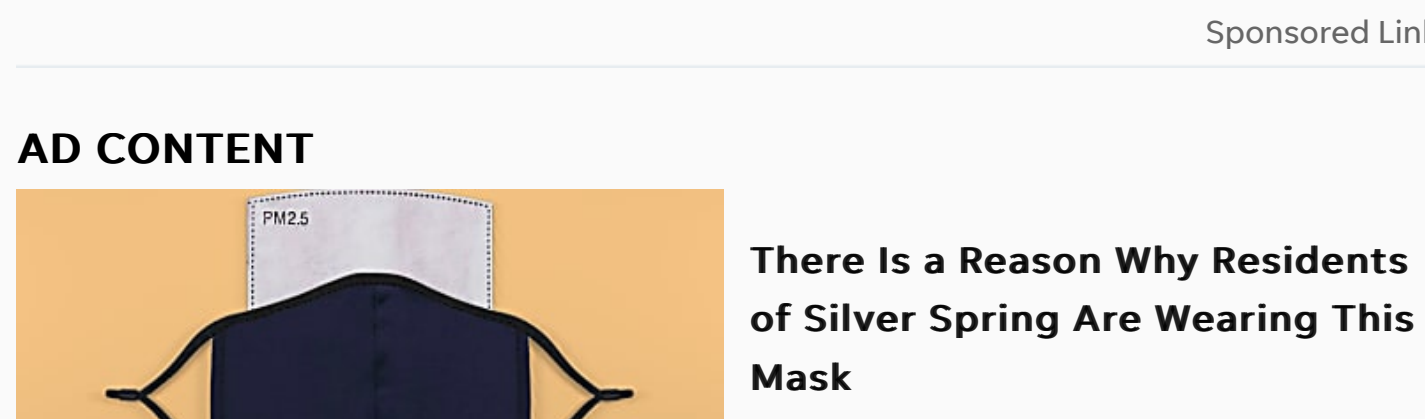
For example, during the State of Emergency, Delawareans can seek care from their medical provider via telemedicine, even if they have never before visited the provider in person. Previously, telehealth services were only covered if there was a relationship between the patient and the medical provider, established through an in-person visit. We encourage these flexibilities to continue throughout the course of the pandemic and beyond.

Don't delay seeking medical care. Delaware hospitals and medical offices are open, safe, and are ready to care for you.

Mark B. Thompson is executive director of the Medical Society of Delaware. Wayne A. Smith is president and CEO of the Delaware Healthcare Association.



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