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## **Introduction**

In order to help communicate with the citizens of Moore County, county Health Director Robert Wittmann, MPH has partnered with Paul Kuzma, MD to prepare a series of articles meant to inform the public about Covid-19 and public health. Dr. Kuzma has practiced medicine in Moore County for over 20 years and is currently completing his Masters of Public Health degree at Johns Hopkins University. This is the eighth in a series of articles prepared by Dr. Paul Kuzma to further public understanding of Covid-19

## **A Time for Reflection**

Anyone who has seen the musical Hamilton either in the theater or on TV will remember the character John Laurens, a friend of Lafayette, Hamilton and Hercules Mulligan. In the show, he is a fan favorite, but in life, he was a fascinating and accomplished legislator, diplomat and soldier. He was born in South Carolina to a wealthy family of rice growers. He was educated in Europe and returned to the United States to fight for the Continental army. He was an aide-de-camp for General Washington, rose to the rank of Colonel, was a prisoner of war, and a diplomat to France. He accomplished all of this before he turned 28.

Colonel Laurens was one of the last Americans to die in the Revolutionary War. He died in a skirmish in South Carolina a few weeks before the British pulled out of Charleston. The negotiations for the Treaty of Paris to end the Revolutionary War were almost final. His life was lost in an inconsequential battle after the war had effectively been won. I hope we can learn from his tragic death.

We have been engaged in a battle against the SARS-CoV-2, the virus that cause COVID-19. But there is hope on the horizon. Several vaccine trials have shown great potential in their ability to protect against this disease. There are significant challenges that need to be overcome to get us vaccinated, but with American ingenuity, I have no doubt that can be done. We are close, but it will still take a few months. Don't be like John Laurens. Stay healthy for a few more months. Help is on the way.

We are all tired of COVID-19. We all long for a return to normalcy and a time when we can gather as friends and families in large groups in public spaces. We need our schools to be open 5 days a week so our children can learn and grow. We need our businesses to survive to provide jobs and security to their employees.

As I write this article, we are entering what looks to be the worst wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March, there were about 40,000 new cases per day, in August we had a peak of almost 60,000 cases per day, currently we are seeing over

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160,000 cases per day. This at a time when people are moving indoors and will be travelling and gathering for the holidays. What we have seen thus far is that an increase in cases is followed by an increase in deaths about 3 weeks later. I expect there to be a significant increase in people dying of COVID-19 over the next few months. It is likely that there will be 3000 Americans dying every day from COVID.

Three thousand Americans dying a day is the equivalent of 10 jumbo jet crashes in America a day. Every day. How would we respond if 10 airplanes were crashing every day? Would we consider it a personal freedom to fly, or would we demand a strong and coordinated response from our elected officials? Would we leave it up to the individual states to make rules on airline safety?

As of November 20<sup>th</sup> COVID-19 has taken the lives of over 250,000 Americans. That is more than 4 times the 58,220 Americans who died in the Vietnam War, and more than half of the 405,000 Americans who died during World War II. All of these people, our fellow citizens, have died within the last 9 months. Many of them have been our most vulnerable. Yes, they are old, or infirmed, or in a nursing home, or a minority, or poor. That doesn't take away from the fact that they are our fellow citizens, our parents, grandparents, friends, colleagues. When did America stop caring about our elders, our sick and our poor?

It is human nature to seek understanding. We want to know why something happens. It's easy to say that someone was old, or sick, or poor, or overweight, to explain why they died. "Surely, if I don't fit into those categories, I must be safe." For the most part, that is true, though there have been young and healthy people who have died of COVID-19. What we may not realize is that over 50% of Americans have at least one factor that puts them at risk for severe COVID and death. While it may not be you, it is certain that here are people you know, respect and love who are at high risk of dying.

As I write this article, we are heading into the holiday season. It is a time of reflection and faith. It is a time to treat each other with kindness and respect. Let us all respect our elders, our sick and our poor. Wear a mask. Remember, "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, thus you do unto me." Matthew 25:40

Happy Thanksgiving. May peace and kindness be with you.

Paul