

# Guest Column: Don't let the pandemic stop you from getting the support you need now

opinion/columns/guest

**Dr. Lantie Jorandby** Guest Columnist

Published 5:00 a.m. ET Aug. 22, 2021

[View Comments](#)



If you need help with an alcohol or drug issue, don't let Covid keep you from getting help.

The recent Covid surge is again causing residents to feel a lot of fear about their physical and mental health. My concern is that this fear will prevent people from going into treatment for addiction and other mental illnesses because they're worried about being exposed to or contracting Covid while there.

As the chief medical officer of a large addiction treatment center in Jacksonville, I want to say this: As has been the case throughout the pandemic, addiction treatment centers are some of the safest places you can be, thanks to rigorous Covid protocols.

Here's the alarming reality about Covid and addiction:

Addiction and the mood disorders that often go along with addiction (namely depression and anxiety) are pre-existing conditions that increase Covid risks. So, there's more urgency than ever to get treatment if needed.

Research published last month in JAMA Psychiatry shows that people with active untreated addictions and mental health disorders are more likely to die or become very ill if they contract Covid.

The isolation and loneliness caused by physical distancing have led to a surge in substance use disorders, relapses, and overdoses during Covid.

In a normal pandemic-free environment, people can be anxious and hesitant about seeking addiction treatment. I understand that because it is a big step. These doubts climb higher during Covid for many people.

Here are some specific things you should know about that our center and other leading facilities are doing now to keep people safe:

We have exhaustive protocols in place regarding frequent testing of patients and staff, quarantining of new or Covid-exposed patients, cleaning and sanitizing of all rooms and surfaces, mask-wearing, and physical distancing.

We stayed ahead of the curve on CDC guidelines. At physician-led Florida treatment centers like mine, our providers are well trained in internal medicine and how infections spread. We also followed supplemental guidance from the Florida Department of Health and other authorities that added to what we were hearing from the CDC.

We didn't relent and lower our safety standards earlier this year when vaccinations revved up and infection rates declined. We stayed the course, kept our focus, and we remain determined to safeguard our patients, families, and staff.

Many of us never closed during the pandemic—not because we didn't want to, but because we didn't need to. At my place of work, for example, the incidence of positive cases was extremely low, even when the pandemic raged last winter.

The addiction treatment field has been on a mission from day one to do well for our patients during Covid, because they depend on us. This battle against addiction is life and death for us, every day, and we must get it right even when there's a pandemic happening outside our doors.

Addiction treatment providers do not see Covid and addiction as mutually exclusive priorities. In caring for one pandemic (addiction), in no way do we put people at risk for the other pandemic (Covid). We believe you can and should fight both life and death issues at the same time.

At my center, we offer vaccinations to all patients, we mandate vaccinations for staff, and we're offering vaccinations to our partners, loved ones of our patients, and all other affiliated members of the community who need them.

If you or a loved has a drug or alcohol problem and you need help, don't let the fear of Covid stop you from because good addiction treatment centers are safer than ever these days. Please get help as soon as possible.

*Dr. Lantie Jorandby is the Chief Medical Officer at Lakeview Health in Jacksonville*



Dr. Lantie Jorandby *Dr. Lantie Jorandby*