Electric Scooters during a Pandemic: Cutting out Emergency Room Visits and Coronavirus Disease 2019 Transmission

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Sir,

In the current pandemic climate, ordinances across the world have attempted to minimize nonessential activities that increase the transmission of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Social distancing has become one of the most effective tools in flattening the epidemiologic curve of infection among humans. Although there are many efforts to limit access to public equipment acting as fomites for the virus, we have noticed that public access to standing electric scooters remains intact.

Continued activity of electric scooters poses 2 urgent problems. First and foremost, the electric scooters have no routine cleaning. With community spread of COVID-19, this is particularly unsettling because research indicates that the virus may live on surfaces for up to 3 days.1 Although electric scooter companies have made efforts to increase decontamination of devices between rides, without appropriate sanitizing materials at all docking stations, the scooters remain a concern for public viral transmission.

Second, in a time when the American health system is acutely overburdened, the scooters are a source of unnecessary patient trauma and hospital admissions. Several retrospective studies have investigated the incidence of emergency room visits and injuries associated with standing electric scooters. In 2019, Trivedi et al2 analyzed admission rates secondary to electric scooters over 1 year in 2 emergency departments affiliated with University of California, Los Angeles. They noted 249 admissions, with injuries ranging from fractures, head trauma, contusions, sprains, and lacerations. This is not a regional issue. A follow-up study by Namiri et al3 examining the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System cited a dramatic increase of injuries and hospital admissions secondary to electric scooter use nationwide, most frequently encountered among patients of 18–34 years of age. At the largest level 1 trauma center in the Tampa Bay area, there have been 286 scooter-related emergency room visits since the introduction of the electric scooters for public access in the area in May 2019. This represents a 6-fold increase in cases compared with the previous year. These are incidents that remain preventable and especially burdensome to the healthcare system.

On March 21, 2020, the chief executive officer of Lime mentioned “pausing services” in all markets except South Korea in an online press release. Concurrently, Bird Rides, Inc., has announced removing its electric scooters from several cities around the United States. Unfortunately, none of these actions have been applied to the scooters in the Tampa Bay area.

We implore that efforts prohibiting electric scooter use be extended to the entire state of Florida to set precedence for the remainder of the country. Across the United States, COVID-19–positive cases and death tolls continue to rise, leading us to the following question, “Should we not try to eliminate all sources of preventable viral transmission and avoidable causes of emergency department visits?” During a time when healthcare resources are scarce, we propose banning nonessential electric scooter activities that impart a greater burden on our healthcare system.

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DISCLOSURE
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REFERENCES