

As a physician I am alarmed by the use of tear gas as a means to control crowds at current protests in Portland, Oregon and across our nation. We are battling the COVID-19 pandemic and tear gas and crowds are two factors that can worsen this ongoing public health crisis. I stand with those peacefully protesting against police brutality. I thank the legislature for outlawing tear gas use in the special session. But you left a loop hole which is being exploited and people are suffering.

A succinct statement from Oregon Health and Science University Hospital's President Dr Danny Jacobs explains how "tear gas is a chemical that attacks the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, throat and lungs and causes severe pain and irritation; exposure to tear gas can result in blindness, bleeding, crying and coughing. The release of airborne droplets through tear gas-induced coughing could accelerate the spread of COVID-19 and lead to a surge in new cases. Damage to the respiratory tract can put individuals at greater risk of adverse outcomes if they become infected with COVID-19."

The use of tear gas can exacerbate the pandemic in Oregon by harming all of us: protestors, law enforcement, their families, and entire communities. Its status as being "non-lethal" is in question if it facilitates the spread and infection of COVID-19 and damages the airway so that patients face increased morbidity or mortality from its use. This is a public health issue and you must close the loop hole allowing the use of this dangerous agent.

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Sent from my iPhone