

COVID-19: Temporary but Necessary Measures

By Ed Finkel

The postponement of St. Patrick's Day parades in Chicago and the upcoming City Council meeting might seem to portend end times. While that's not exactly true, the coronavirus-inspired actions of the past week do portend the end of anything resembling normal times, at least for the next several weeks and possibly longer. As this is being written, Mayor Lori Lightfoot has asked that all Chicagoans who have been tested positive with coronavirus or are showing symptoms to stay home.

Many workplaces are operating remotely; bars, restaurants, schools and other public gathering places are shuttered; City Hall is closed to the public; most CCLT residents are sheltered in their residences, except for brief trips to the grocery store, doctor's office and other essentials; and we're being reminded to wash our hands repeatedly and follow "social distance" guidelines by keeping six feet away from other people. With the health situation changing by the day, it appears that most of the population is taking this crisis seriously.

And public health officials both locally and nationally are imploring anyone who hasn't yet gotten the message to do just that. "The virus seems to be spreading easily from person to person, and we encourage everyone to take measures to reduce the risk of exposure," according to the [COVID-19 information page](#) on the Chicago Department of Public Health website. "Everyone has a role to play in getting ready and staying healthy."

Reducing the Spread of Virus - and Rumors

As of St. Patrick's Day, CDPH reported 63 cases of coronavirus in Chicago and 160 overall in Illinois, and those numbers are increasing daily. As this is being written on March 19, Governor J.B. Pritzker announced that there are now 422 cases in Illinois. Those who have been affected include first responders, health care providers, and others in "helping" occupations.

The State of Illinois has mandated cancellation of events with more than 50 people, and the White House has suggested that there be no events with more than 10 participants. Bars and restaurants in the state will be closed through March 30 at least, and Chicago Public Schools will be closed through April 20, with meals available for pickup from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. outside of all CPS schools, and [other food providers available](#) to support families in need.

CDPH recommends that older people and those with chronic conditions stay at home 24-7 if at all possible, and that employers strongly urge employees who are feeling sick to stay home. The closures of child-care facilities and higher education institutions remains voluntary, while most (if not all) community- and faith-based organizations either have canceled or scaled down public gatherings and otherwise taken steps to protect their clients and employees. Stores are offering special hours for older residents to do their necessary shopping in a reduced risk environment.

While movement restrictions face those who have returned within the past 14 days from countries on Travel Alert Level 3, as measured by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the CDPH also encouraged Chicagoans to support those coming out of quarantine, as well as helping "reduce the spread of rumors by letting people know that viruses cannot target people from specific populations, ethnicities, or racial backgrounds."

Getting Your Home Ready

To prepare your home for the coronavirus outbreak, [the CDC recommends](#) creating a household action plan, meeting with other household members to talk about one another's needs.

Think about how you would care for the more vulnerable members of your household and contact your healthcare provider to get their recommendations. Get to know your neighbors and talk to them about emergency planning, and create an emergency contact list that includes everyone from friends, to healthcare providers, to employers. Finally, identify community organizations that would have information, services, support and resources.

As the outbreak progresses, keep seeking out up-to-date information about the spread of the disease and recommendations from authorities, and stay home from school or work if any member of your household falls ill. If possible, ensure that anyone who gets sick uses a separate bedroom and bathroom from everyone else, provide them with a face mask to wear, and avoid sharing personal items, the CDC says.

Even if no one is sick, continue to cover coughs and sneezes, wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds throughout the day (or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol), and clean surfaces and objects on a daily basis if they are frequently touched, using regular household detergent and water, the CDC says. As social as they may be, encourage children and teens to stay home rather than gathering with their peers during their time attending online school, to slow the spread of COVID-19.

The bottom line is that the coronavirus will continue to spread until a vaccine is found, infecting millions if not tens of millions of Americans. But following the recommendations and dictates of public health authorities will slow the spread, enabling healthcare institutions to better keep up with the more serious cases requiring hospital beds and ventilators -- and hopefully keep the numbers of cases and deaths lower than they otherwise would be.

And once it's all over, people will be able to resume their normal lives, even though this entire experience is going to change what is "normal" for many of us.

