

COVID-19 Close to Home

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At a time like now, it's especially vital to follow medically recommended guidelines for self-protection.

Until COVID-19 passes as a potential threat, there's no choice but to adapt to a new reality that may be around for some time.

As of Tuesday, Chicago where I live reported 63 confirmed COVID-19 cases — 160 in Illinois, one death so far, a Chicago woman in her 60s with an unspecified “underlying condition.”

Illinois Governor Pritzker ordered events in the state of more than 50 people cancelled. White House guidelines advised against gatherings of more than 10 people.

On March 17, Chicago public schools closed at least through month's end. Closure most likely will continue through the remainder of the school year.

Students from needy families given school lunches will continue getting them on a pick-up basis outside their schools from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM Monday through Friday.

The Greater Chicago Food Depository still operates, no closure plans indicated so far.

Chicago Park District facilities scaled back activities, some still offered in “safe settings.”

Many greater Chicago colleges and universities shifted classroom gatherings to online instruction for an indefinite period.

City authorities advised local businesses to encourage or order employees to work at home if possible — if feel ill, stay home.

As of Monday, all restaurants and bars in Illinois were ordered closed to the public indefinitely — other than for food deliveries and drive through pickups.

City religious facilities were advised to cancel large gatherings and institute social distancing.

Illinois Governor Pritzker activated small numbers of National Guard forces to provide logistical and medical support for COVID-19 responses.

One greater Chicago community ordered the closure of movie theaters, health and fitness centers, bowling allies, and other recreational and entertainment facilities where large numbers of people gather.

In the coming days, the above mandate may be instituted statewide, perhaps nationwide for

an indefinite period.

Flights at Chicago's Midway Airport were suspended after a traffic controller and two other employees tested positive for COVID-19.

According to the FAA, the airport remains open to operate "at a reduced rate until the situation is resolved."

At Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, the world's highest air traffic facility in 2019, passengers arriving from abroad are being screened before allowed to leave, the process taking hours because of high volume.

It's creating angst among passengers over standing next to hundreds of others at a time when authorities want large gatherings avoided.

Customs clearance is under federal jurisdiction. State and local authorities urged measures to alleviate what's going on to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading.

Chicago Botanic Garden closed. Outdoor areas of Brookfield Zoo and Morton Arboretum remain open for now.

911 operators began screening callers for possible COVID-19 symptoms.

Chicago has an excellent fire department-run paramedic service, help gotten expeditiously by calling 911 — as long as not overwhelmed with high volume.

The Chicago Police Department (CPD) assigned teams of officers in each district to respond as needed in cases of suspected COVID-19.

A CPD command center was established to meet daily on the issue.

ComEd suspended service cancellations for nonpayments, late payment charges waived for customers unable to pay on time.

Public transportation continues to operate despite a large drop in riders. The same goes for area rail traffic. Reduced schedules are likely coming.

The University of Illinois' main Springfield and Chicago campuses cancelled commencement ceremonies scheduled for May to avoid large gatherings.

Some area hospitals banned visitors, some exceptions made for immediate family members in special cases.

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot said all non-essential city workers were ordered to work from home — police, fire, and other emergency service staff excluded, as well as streets and sanitation workers, airport employees, and city water department staff.

An area nursing home reported 22 COVID-19 cases. Some medical facilities are offering "curbside coronavirus testing."

Tuesday's Illinois primary was held as scheduled instead of postponing it for a later date.

Macy's (formerly Marshall Field's, Chicago's flagship department store from 1852), Bloomingdale's, Nordstrom, Saks Fifth Avenue, Neiman Marcus, Apple, Nike, Ralph Lauren, and numerous other city retailers closed temporarily — some perhaps to go bankrupt and not reopen.

According to Chicago retail data, store traffic over the last six weeks declined by about one-third, heading lower each week.

Even food markets announced reduced hours. Chicago's Monday City Council meeting was cancelled because it has 50 members — plus staff and press covering proceedings, no rescheduled date set.

The Regional Transportation Authority closed its customer service offices and cancelled scheduled meetings.

Mass layoffs are beginning in Chicago, Illinois statewide, and nationwide.

On Tuesday, USA Today reported that they're "accelerat(ing)" — notably by retailers, restaurants, and other service sector firms.

Marriott Hotels announced that it's furloughing tens of thousands of workers, the same likely true for most other hotels.

According to Challenger, Gray and Christmas, 7.4 million leisure, travel, and hospitality sector workers could face temporary layoffs — adding: "Things are really accelerating quickly."

The American Hotel & Lodging Association and the US Travel Association estimated that one million hotel jobs were already eliminated or will be in the coming weeks.

The new normal will continue for an indefinite time until the spread of COVID-19 abates.

On Monday, Trump claimed his response to the outbreak has been a perfect "10..."(W)e've done a great job."

Not according to public health experts. Harvard Global Health Institute's Dr. Ashish Jha said his regime's "response has been abysmal. It's hard to imagine how they could've done it worse," adding:

"We're still the only major country in the world that (is not) do(ing) widespread testing for coronavirus for people who are sick. That's insane given our technical and scientific capacity."

According to an NPR/PBS News Hour/Marist poll released Tuesday, 60% of respondents expressed little trust in how the Trump regime is dealing with COVID-19 outbreaks.

My downtown Chicago residential building in the city's Streeterville area near the landmark Water Tower is a microcosm of how others in the city, nationwide and elsewhere are dealing with COVID-19 outbreaks.

Normal building activities are suspended until further notice, risk management practices replacing them after an employee of a commercial business in the building tested positive

for COVID-19.

A food market in the building, its most valued amenity, is now restricted to residents and staff, its operating hours subject to change.

Any resident known to had contact with a COVID-19 positive individual is ordered to self-quarantine and keep out of common areas, including elevators.

Building staff will help as needed. Any resident testing positive for the disease must notify the management office immediately.

Except for the food market, all other building amenities are closed and off-limits until further notice.

Residents and visitors are instructed not to “congregate” in common areas, urged to maintain a safe distance from others, and not visit the management office.

Communicate by phone or email instead. Non-emergency work orders are temporarily suspended.

Scheduled events for residents are cancelled through May 31. Food deliveries will be in the lobby, not to individual apartments.

Remodeling projects are suspended until further notice. Residents are asked to limit outside visitations.

Further restrictions may follow, the building not so far quarantined that could happen if outbreaks are reported among residents.

For now social distancing is the order of the day as a precaution against spreading COVID-19.

It hasn't remotely advanced to epidemic or pandemic levels as falsely reported, but it's wise to follow sound personal hygiene and dietary practices that promote good health.

So far, less than 200,000 global infections were reported, around 6,200 in the US, around 100 deaths in the country.

The numbers are small but could rise significantly in the weeks and months ahead.

So it's better to be safe than sorry, inconvenience a minor issue to put up with. Staying healthy matters most.

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