



COOK COUNTY HEALTH

DEBRA CAREY

INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (Addendum to Presentation)

July 29, 2020

Activities and Announcements

- Stroger Hospital was recognized this week by the 2020-2021 annual ***U.S. News & World Report*** survey as a high-performing hospital for Heart Failure and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. This is the fourth year for the hospital to be ranked as a high-performing hospital for Heart Failure. *U.S. News & World Report* annually releases rankings for organizations based on several factors, including outcomes, patient safety, nurse staffing and more. Hospitals are also rated for their performance in treating more commonly occurring conditions and medical procedures. High-performing organizations rank within the top 10 percent nationally of a given specialty. Hospitals that are high-performing are considered significantly better than the national average.
- The [Lown Institute](#) recently gave Stroger Hospital an A and ranked it 13 of 158 hospitals in a new ranking system that measures: Civic Leadership, which assesses a commitment to equity, inclusion and community health; Value of Care, which measures use of unnecessary services; and Patient Outcomes, which evaluates patient safety, satisfaction, and clinical outcomes. In its [press release](#), the institute said they “used never-before-considered measures to help hospitals better serve and support their communities. The Index shows how nearly 3,300 U.S. hospitals compare on 42 performance indicators.” More information can be found [here](#).
- WBEZ reported this week that **Mercy Hospital** intends to close. Mercy’s parent company, Trinity, will seek state approval to close in 2021.

Food as Medicine

- As access to healthy food remains a great need for our patients and communities, the **Fresh Truck** partnership between Cook County Health (CCH) and the **Greater Chicago Food Depository** (GCFD) continues. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic required CCH and GCFD to develop and implement revised protocols for the Fresh Truck distributions that allow for appropriate screenings and social distancing to protect patients, as well as CCH and GCFD staff and volunteers. These revised protocols are in place until further notice.

Through July 17, CCH’s Fresh Truck partnership with the GCFD resulted in 268 visits to 13 CCH health centers – Arlington Heights, Austin, Blue Island, the CORE Center, Cottage Grove, Englewood, Logan Square, Near South, North Riverside, Provident/Sengstacke, Prieto, Robbins, and Woodlawn.

Collectively, the Fresh Truck distributions have resulted in the provision of fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as some shelf stable items during the COVID-19 pandemic, to an estimated 34,870 individuals, representing 115,674 household members, totaling more than 707,500 pounds of food. Most of the individuals benefiting from the Fresh Truck screened positive for food insecurity at a CCH health center visit.

The Greater Chicago Food Depository's Fresh Food Truck visits for the month of August include the following ACHN Health Centers.

- August 4 – **North Riverside Health Center** – 1800 S. Harlem Avenue, Suite A, North Riverside, IL 60546
 - August 6 – **Austin Health Center** – 4800 W. Chicago Avenue, Chicago, IL 60651
 - August 11 – **Cottage Grove Health Center** – 1645 Cottage Grove Avenue, Ford Heights, IL 60411
 - August 18 – **Robbins Health Center** – 13450 S. Kedzie Avenue, Robbins, IL 60472
 - August 20 – **Englewood Health Center** – 1135 W. 69th Street, Chicago, IL 60621
 - August 20 – **Near South Health Center** – 3525 S. Michigan, Chicago, IL 60653
 - August 25 – **Woodlawn Health Center** – 6337 S. Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, IL 60634
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- Three CCH health centers will host “grab and go” **Summer Meals** during the weeks when school is not in session for the summer. Children 18 years and younger can pick up free, healthy meals at the following CCH health centers:
 - Cottage Grove Health Center in Ford Heights
12pm-1pm / Monday, Wednesday, Friday
June 22 through August 28 (closed July 3 and August 7)
 - Englewood Health Center in Chicago
11am-12:30pm / Monday – Friday
June 22 through September 4 (closed July 3)
 - Robbins Health Center in Robbins
12pm-1pm / Monday – Friday
June 23 through September 4 (closed July 3)

Children are not required to be a current patient of CCH to access Summer Meals at our sites. Additional sites can be located by calling 1-800-359-2163, texting FOODIL to 877877, or visiting www.SummerMealsIllinois.org. The Greater Chicago Food Depository is the local partner in the Summer Meals program, which is funded through the United States Department of Agriculture and administered by the Illinois State Board of Education.

IMPACT 2023 Objective 5.1C

Community Outreach

- The new **virtual community affairs** resource section on the CCH website will be live shortly. This one-stop webpage will provide visitors with resources, the ability to ask questions about programs, sign up for the community newsletter and ask for speaker participation at events. The page will also highlight Cook County Health’s activities in addressing social determinants of health.
- In partnership with President Preckwinkle, the Cook County Board of Commissioners, and the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development, Cook County Health continues to encourage residents, particularly the county’s vulnerable populations, to be counted as part of the **2020 Census**. Census awareness posters have been placed at the entrances of all our facilities. In addition, all the editions of the email-based Community Newsletter *System News* have had a census awareness message, and Cook County Health continues to promote the Census through its social media channels.

IMPACT 2023 Objective 5.2C

- Cook County Health Community Advisory Councils include patients, community and religious organizations and serve as a way to promote our services in the communities where our centers are located. The Councils provide feedback to our staff and help strengthen our health centers' relationships in the community. The councils meet quarterly to provide current information on Cook County Health and as an avenue for members to share information about their organizations.

Upcoming CAC meeting dates:

Arlington Heights: Tuesday at 1:00 PM: August 11, November 10
3520 N. Arlington Heights Road, Arlington Heights, IL 60004

Joint South Suburban: Thursday at 1:00 PM: August 20, November 19

Robbins: 13450 S. Kedzie Road, Robbins, IL 60472

Cottage Grove: 1645 S. Cottage Grove Avenue, Ford Heights, IL 60411

Englewood: Thursday at 1:00 PM: September 17, December 17
1135 W. 69th Street, Chicago, IL 60621

North Riverside: Thursday at 1:00 PM: September 24 – first meeting
1800 S. Harlem Avenue, Suite A, North Riverside, IL 60546

IMPACT 2023 Focus Area 5

Community Outreach

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| August 8 | The 91st annual Bud Billiken Parade will be postponed this year for the first time in its 91-year history due to health considerations and city ordinances as they pertain to Covid-19. In keeping with the spirit of the second largest parade in the country, the Chicago Defender Charities will join their longtime partner ABC 7 for an hour-long special, BUD BILLIKEN®: CELEBRATING 91 YEARS . Hosted by ABC 7's Cheryl Burton, Jim Rose and Hosea Sanders, the special captures great parade memories and showcases new stories, Saturday, August 8 at 1 PM on ABC 7 Chicago. Provident Hospital Medical Director Dr. Arnold Turner will have a speaking segment as part of this special.
(https://www.budbillikenparade.org/) |
| August 8 | Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the Chicago Family Health Center – South Chicago's "Safely Back to School" Drive thru Health Fair , which will take place at their South Chicago site located at 9119 S. Exchange in Chicago. At the event, each agency will be represented by a vehicle, and each vehicle will be assigned a bay to park in. The participant cars will come through and pass each agency. The participant car will have their trunk open for us to put in a packet of info or goodies. Agencies can set up a table display, but there will be no direct contact with anyone. The cars will view and pass each bay and get goodies with education info, of course, put into their trunk. |
| August 15 | Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the Catholic Charities Health Fair , which is taking place at the St. Frances of Rome School , located at 1401 S. Austin Boulevard in Cicero. Catholic Charities will offer a free health fair, which will include back-to-school physicals and immunizations for children, dental screenings for adults and children, and a variety of other health screenings for adults. |
| August 19 | Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the Chicago Family Health Center – Pullman's "Safely Back to School" Drive thru Health Fair which will take place at their Pullman site located at 570 E. 115 th Street in Chicago. At the event, each agency will be represented by a vehicle, and each vehicle |

will be assigned a bay to park in. The participant cars will come through and pass each agency. The participant car will have their trunk open for us to put in a packet of info or goodies. Agencies can set up a table display, but there will be no direct contact with anyone. The cars will view and pass each bay and get goodies with education info, of course, put into their trunk.

Legislative Update

State

- The Illinois General Assembly's Fall Session will take place November 17-19 and December 1-3. No other session days are currently scheduled.
- The federal government approved the revised Hospital Assessment Program, retroactive to July 1, 2020. Governor Pritzker also signed [SB2541](#) (PA 101-0650), which codifies the changes approved by federal CMS. The revised hospital assessment program provides a net gain of \$449M for participating hospitals; CCH does not participate in the hospital assessment program. The bill sunsets December 31, 2022.
- Governor Pritzker also signed [SB1864](#) (PA 101-0649), which codifies a number of provisions related to Medicaid that HFS implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including suspending redeterminations and allowing presumptive eligibility for adults. The bill also requires a feasibility study led by HFS and the Illinois Department of Insurance to "explore options to make health insurance more affordable".
- The Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) [issued a provider notice](#) that affirms state law and requirements in the Medicaid program that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The notice also clarified that a federal Final Rule published June 12 does not have any effect on gender-affirming surgeries and services covered by Illinois Medicaid.
- HFS announced that current youth in care (children in the custody of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services or DCFS) will participate in mandatory Medicaid managed care starting September 1, 2020. YouthCare, run by IlliniCare, was awarded the contract to serve as the Medicaid Managed Care Organization for this population.
- Governor Pritzker issued [new guidance to help combat the resurgence of COVID-19](#), including metrics that would indicate when additional restrictions may go into effect and new regions of the state that correspond with the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Regions. [Regional dashboards](#) can be found on the Illinois Department of Public Health's website.

Federal

- In late June and into July conversations between Congressional Republicans and the Administration continued around provisions for the next coronavirus relief bill, including an adjustment to the enhanced unemployment insurance, liability shield for employers and funding to support reopening schools.
- **Medicaid Fiscal Accountability Regulation** – In the first week of July the White House posted its Spring 2020 Update to the Unified Regulatory Agenda. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) posted that it plans to finalize MFAR by September. Securing a congressional moratorium on finalizing MFAR continues.
- **HHS Allocation of CARES Act Provider Relief Funds** – On July 10, HHS announced it would distribute approximately \$3 billion to hospitals serving a large percentage of vulnerable populations with very low profit margins, as well as approximately \$1 billion to specialty rural hospitals, urban hospitals with certain rural Medicare designations, and hospitals in small metropolitan areas.

- On July 17, HHS announced that it would begin distributing \$10 billion from the Provider Relief Fund in a second round of high impact COVID-19 area funding to hospitals. Stroger and Provident each received funding in this round.

Additionally, HHS plans to distribute about \$15 billion to eligible providers that participate in state Medicaid/CHIP programs or Medicaid managed care plans and have not yet received a payment from the Provider Relief Fund General Distribution allocation. CCH is not eligible for this round since it already received an allocation.

Advocates continue to be concerned that the process HHS has adopted has not been transparent and continue to advocate for additional targeted funding.

- **Budget and Appropriations** – On July 24, the House passed the first four FY 2021 appropriations bills. The week of July 27, it plans to take a package of seven bills to the floor. This seven-bill “mini-bus” includes funding for HHS.

Republicans object to the funding levels in all of the House bills, as well as specific programmatic funding priorities, and the Senate has not yet begun to move its versions through the subcommittee and committee process. It is likely that one or more continuing resolutions (CRs) will be required to fund the government past the end of the current fiscal year on September 30.

The bill provides a total of \$96.4 billion for HHS, \$1.5 billion above the FY 2020 level.

CDC: The bill includes a total of \$8 billion for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an increase of \$232 million above the FY 2020 level. This includes \$856 million in transfers from the Prevention and Public Health Fund. The bill includes investments in public health infrastructure including:

- \$50 million for a multi-year effort to modernize public health data surveillance and analytics at CDC, State and local health departments, and the National Center for Health Statistics.
- \$363 million, an increase of \$10 million above the FY 2020 enacted level, for epidemiologic and laboratory support at State and eligible public health agencies.

The bill provides increases for numerous public health efforts, including \$150 million, an increase of \$10 million above the FY 2020 level to support CDC’s efforts to reduce new HIV infections by 90 percent in 10 years; \$67 million, an increase of \$7 million above the FY 2020 level, for the Racial and Ethnic Approach to Community Health (REACH) program.

SAMHSA: The bill funds the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) at \$6 billion – an increase of \$96 million above the FY 2020 level.

HRSA: The bill allocates the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) \$7.2 billion, an increase of \$159 million above the 2020 level. This includes \$2.4 billion, an increase of \$25 million above the FY 2020 level, for the Ryan White HIV/AIDS program.

Gun Violence Research: The bill provides \$50 million for firearm injury and mortality prevention research at the National Institute of Health and at the CDC. This is an increase of \$25 million above the FY 2020 level funding.

Protection of Medicaid remains a key priority for CCH at both the State and Federal level.

Media and social media report attached.

Cook County Health Media Compilation

June 25 – July 25, 2020



Chicago Tribune



Media Dashboard: June 25-July 25, 2020

Total Number of Media Hits: 84

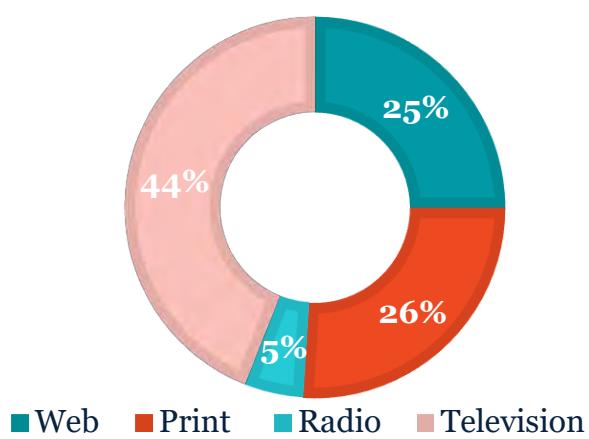
Top 5 Local Media Outlets

1. *Chicago Tribune*
2. *CBS-2 News*
3. *WGN-9 News*
4. *Crain's Chicago Business*
5. *NBC-5, FOX-32 and WTTW*

Top 5 National Media Outlets

1. *MSN*
2. *Yahoo! News*
3. *CNN*
4. *Associated Press*
5. *New York Times*

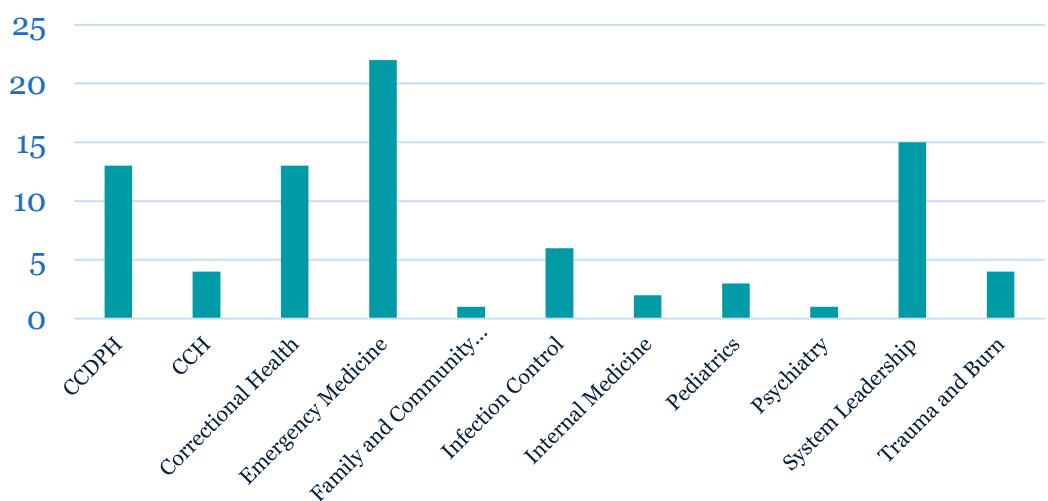
Media Outlet Type



Most Common Topics

1. Increase in opioid overdoses in Cook County
2. CDC study on dramatic decrease in COVID-19 cases at jail
3. Budget gap due to COVID-19
4. Importance of following public health guidelines for COVID-19
5. COVID-19 research studies at CCH
6. Travel restrictions due to COVID-19
7. Hot weather
8. Children and masking
9. Fireworks safety
10. Donations
11. New CEO search
12. Contact tracing

Media Mentions by Department





[Health Pulse Chicago: Contact tracing expansion • AbbVie backs bioscience incubator • \\$5B more for nursing homes](#)

July 23, 2020

\$50 MIL FOR STATE CONTACT TRACING: Illinois Department of Public Health will provide \$50 million to 57 local health departments in the next two weeks to assist with contract tracing efforts, according to a statement.

The grants are geared toward community organizations and agencies outside Cook County.

"By working with established community-based organizations, we are hoping to reach people who may be at higher risk of infection, but hesitant to talk with health officials," IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike said in the statement. "We need people who are trusted in communities across the state to let people who have been in close contact with a confirmed case know that they need to monitor their health and take steps to potentially prevent spread of the virus."

[Chicago](#) and Cook County are running their own community programs.

JOIN US JULY 30: Crain's health care reporter Stephanie Goldberg will moderate a discussion with three local hospital CEOs on how the COVID-19 pandemic is reshaping the future of the industry. Panelists include Debra Carey, interim CEO of Cook County Health; José Sánchez, president and CEO of Norwegian American Hospital; and Jim Skogsbergh, president and CEO of Advocate Aurora Health.

Register to attend virtually by clicking [here](#).

Hospital CFO Report

Cook County Health could face more layoffs as CEO search continues

July 23, 2020

Chicago-based Cook County Health will likely have to implement additional cost-cutting initiatives in the coming months and years to address financial struggles stemming from before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, reports the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

Debra Carey, Cook County Health's interim CEO, told the Cook County (Ill.) Board July 21 that the system identified a negative \$162 million expense variance earlier this year in its fiscal year 2020 budget, and it has since implemented nearly \$90 million in nonpersonnel cuts to reduce the pre-COVID-19 deficit to \$75 million as well as reducing overtime and slowing hiring.

She said the actions reduced the deficit to \$61 million as of June 26, and since then, Cook County Health cut 70 nonunion positions to save another \$5 million and is trying to reduce \$30 million in vendor contract costs.

The health system — which lost at least \$85 million through June due to the cancellation of elective surgeries and procedures — is projecting a \$187 million shortfall for fiscal year 2021, which begins Dec. 1, according to the *Sun-Times*.

And Andrea Gibson, the health system's interim chief business officer, said more positions could be cut to save even more money next year, according to the newspaper.

"The uncertainty around the pandemic will further challenge us. We have a team in place continuously monitoring the situation and preparing for a resurgence. Should that resurgence occur, we will have to shift resources again, likely impacting our revenue generating services and causing further budgetary and service pain," said Ms. Carey, who provided a copy of her mid-year budget speech to *Becker's*.

"These next several months and the coming years will be difficult for the entire healthcare industry and we are no exception," she added. "The fiscal year 2021 budget and likely several budgets after that will contain a host of difficult decisions to ensure that CCH is available for the patients who rely on us."

Cook County Health's financial struggles come as the health system's CEO search is underway following the November 2019 ouster of John Jay Shannon, MD.

According to the *Sun-Times*, M. Hill Hammock, chair of the County Health Board of Directors, said during the July 21 mid-year budget hearing that the county expects to name one or two potential finalists possibly in the next two or three weeks.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

[Cook County's search for new health care chief 'close' to finished](#)

July 21, 2020

About eight months after the ouster of Cook County's health care chief, officials said Tuesday they expect to name a couple of potential finalists for the open CEO position within the next "two to three weeks."

"We've had second interviews with a number of candidates, we are evaluating the finalists, and we hope to suggest some finalists — meaning either one or two candidates — within the next two or three weeks possibly," M. Hill Hammock, chair of the County Health Board of Directors, said during a Tuesday mid-year budget hearing. "So, we're close."

The new CEO of the Cook County Health system will face a daunting job.

Projecting a \$187 million shortfall for 2021, the county's health arm faces some choppy fiscal waters ahead, as do many health care providers and municipalities.

Patient fee revenue is down, some projects, including the new Provident Hospital, are on pause until a new CEO is installed, and the system has cut 70 non-union positions to save \$5 million. More workers could be laid off to save even more money next year, and many of those cuts are "permanent deletions," said Andrea Gibson, the health system's interim chief business officer.

"These next several months and the coming years will be difficult for the entire health care industry, and we are absolutely no exception," Debra Carey, Cook County Health's interim CEO said. "The fiscal year 2021 budget, and likely several budgets after this, will contain a host of difficult decisions —decisions that have to be made — to ensure that Cook County Health is available for the patients who rely on us."

The county's \$2.8 billion health care system oversees Stroger and Provident hospitals as well as health care at Cook County Jail and other county sites. The health system also conducts a managed-care program called CountyCare.

Ultimately, the board of Cook County Health will choose the system's new leader.

The last CEO, Dr. John Jay Shannon, was shown the door in November, when the board voted not to renew his contract, the first jolt in a shake-up that also includes the firings of Ekrete Akpan, the chief financial officer at the time, and Dr. Terry Mason, the former head of the county's Department of Public Health.

In February, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle gained more control and oversight over Stroger Hospital and the rest of the county health system, including the power to appoint a member to the system's governing board and giving the County Board power over the top health official's salary and job description.

Hammock said he looks forward to "establishing new leadership" for the health system.

"They will need to reestablish a team of their own and that will be a challenge as well, but we think that's the right thing to do at the right time," Hammock said.

NATIONAL LAW REVIEW

[Illinois, Chicago, Cook County Issue New COVID-19 Guidance, Restrictions](#)

Tuesday, July 21, 2020

Governor J.B. Pritzker has announced an update the state reopening plan. The City of Chicago has updated its quarantine order for travelers from high-incidence states and announced the reinstatement of certain restrictions on businesses. Suburban Cook County has issued travel guidance mirroring Chicago's quarantine order.

State Updates

The Governor announced an [update to the Restore Illinois reopening plan](#) on July 15. The plan divides the state into 11 health regions and provides a tiered mitigation approach if cases of COVID-19 in the state continue to rise.

The City of Chicago and suburban Cook County are now in separate regions. The North Suburban region includes Lake and McHenry County. The West Suburban region includes DuPage and Kane County. The South Suburban region includes Kankakee and Will County. The rest of the state is divided into the North, North-Central, West-Central, Metro East, Southern, and East-Central regions.

The state will consider implementing mitigation actions outlined in the reopening plan if a region experiences:

Three consecutive days averaging greater than or equal to an eight-percent positivity rate; or

A sustained increase in positivity rate over a seven-day rolling average and either:

(a) A sustained seven-day increase in hospital admissions for COVID-19-like illness; or

(b) A reduction in hospital capacity threatening surge capabilities (ICU capacity or medical/surgical beds under 20 percent).

It is unclear how the mitigation procedures will be implemented or if additional mitigation actions will be considered.

The mitigation options (Tier 1 is the least restrictive; Tier 3 is the most restrictive) are listed by industry or activity, including:

- Bars and restaurants
- Hospitals
- Meetings, social events, and religious gatherings
- Offices
- Organized group recreational activities, gyms, and fitness centers
- Retail
- Salons and personal care

In Tier 1, offices may be required to institute remote work for high-risk individuals and continue to emphasize telework for as many workers as possible. Meetings, social events, and religious gatherings may have additional limits imposed. Bars and restaurants may need to reduce indoor dining capacity.

In Tier 2, offices may be required to reduce capacity, with recommendations to resume remote work. Retailers may have to suspend in-person non-essential retail and make online and curbside pick-up available. Bars and restaurants may need to suspend indoor dining and bar service.

In Tier 3, offices may be required to institute remote work for all non-essential workers. All non-essential retail may be suspended. Bars and restaurants may suspend in-person dining.

Chicago Quarantine Order, Restrictions on Businesses

The Chicago Department of Public Health has issued an [Emergency Travel Order](#) requiring travelers entering or returning to Chicago from states with an average COVID-19 case rate greater than 15 new cases per 100,000 residents to quarantine for 14 days or the duration of their stay in Chicago, whichever is shorter. The order applies only to individuals who have spent more than 24 hours in a designated state.

During the quarantine period, individuals must not be in public or otherwise leave their selected dwelling, unless to seek medical care or COVID-19 testing. If seeking medical care or testing, or when traveling to or from the airport, train station, or bus station upon arrival or departure, individuals subject to the order must wear a face covering and must not use public transportation.

The [FAQs](#) associated with the order state that "essential workers" are not subject to the mandatory self-quarantine if they are:

A non-resident of Chicago, are traveling from a designated state to Chicago for the primary purpose of carrying out their primary work in Chicago, and need to be physically present in Chicago to carry out that primary work; or

A resident of Chicago, are returning from a designated state, were in the designated state for the primary purpose of carrying out their primary work in that state, and needed to be physically present in that state to carry out that primary work.

"Essential worker" is a person who works in critical infrastructure, as designated by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. The definition also includes any state, local, and federal officials and employees traveling in their official capacities on government business, including military service. However, an essential worker whose travel was for non-work purposes is subject to the mandatory self-quarantine and is not covered by this exception.

Other exceptions to the order for personal travel also will be permitted for travel related to medical care or parental shared custody arrangements. Additionally, the Commissioner of Health may grant an exemption based upon an organization's or business's testing and other control policies, or in certain extraordinary circumstances, subject to terms and conditions imposed by the Commissioner in the interest of public health. The process for obtaining such an exemption is unclear.

The states originally covered by the order included:

- Alabama
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Florida
- Georgia
- Idaho
- Louisiana
- Mississippi
- Nevada
- North Carolina
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah

Twelve days later, the list was updated to include Iowa and Oklahoma because increasing rates of COVID-19 cases in those states. Kansas was added on July 21. The list will be updated every Tuesday, with changes going into effect on the following Friday.

Additionally, the City of Chicago has announced reinstatement of certain restrictions in light of an uptick in COVID-19 cases in Chicago and surging COVID-19 activity in other states. The following restrictions will go into effect on July 24, at 12:01 a.m.:

Bars, taverns, breweries, and other establishments that serve alcohol for on-site consumption without a retail food license will no longer be able to serve customers indoors.

Restaurants that serve alcohol will be allowed to continue to operate as long as they abide by ongoing COVID-19 guidance and existing regulations.

Establishments that do not serve food may still provide outdoor service as they did during Phase Three of the City's reopening plan.

Maximum party size and table occupancy at restaurants, bars, taverns, and breweries will be reduced to six people.

Indoor fitness class size will be reduced to a maximum of 10 people.

Personal services requiring the removal of face coverings, such as shaves and facials, will no longer be permitted.

Residential property managers will be asked to limit guest entry to five per unit to avoid indoor gatherings and parties.

Cook County Department of Public Health Travel Guidance

The Cook County Department of Public Health issued travel guidance directing travelers to suburban Cook County coming from 17 COVID-19 hotspots to quarantine for 14 days following their last contact with the identified state. The guidance excludes the City of Evanston and Village of Skokie.

Because the travel guidance for suburban Cook County defines high-incidence states in the same way as the Chicago Emergency Travel Order, the respective lists of designated states are the same.

While the suburban Cook County guidelines appear to mirror those implemented by the City of Chicago, the FAQs issued by the Cook County Department of Public Health state that, unlike the City of Chicago, suburban Cook County's travel guidance is only a recommendation, not an order. The Cook County Department of Public Health will not be issuing fines or enforcing the guidance. The Department's dedicated webpage provides additional information relating to this guidance.

Reopening orders contain extensive requirements creating compliance issues that can vary significantly depending on the specific state or local jurisdiction.

[Coping with COVID: State Offers New Plan to Prevent Resurgence, County Jail Cited for Containing Virus](#)

July 19, 2020

New plan for targeting outbreaks. Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced on July 15 a [new plan](#) for how the state will respond if there's a resurgence of COVID-19 spread. The new mitigation plan will more precisely target areas with outbreaks of COVID-19. The four regions of the state's Restore Illinois plan have been split into 11 regions which mostly follow established EMS regions. Homewood and Flossmoor are in the suburban Cook County region.

A region will be subject to steps to reduce an outbreak if it has an increase in the seven-day rolling positivity rate average for seven days in a 10-day period or if it sees three consecutive days with an 8 percent positivity rate. The state's current rolling seven-day average has been hovering around 3 percent.

Local numbers update. As of Sunday, Homewood had increase to 317 total confirmed cases of COVID-19, an increase of 11 in the past week. Flossmoor is up to 108 cases, an increase of 12 in the past week. Deaths remain the same with 32 in Homewood and nine in Flossmoor.

State update. Illinois has seen a modest uptick in case numbers since Phase 4 of the Restore Illinois went into effect at the end of June. The average number of cases per day during the first seven days of July was 752. The average for the seven days ending Sunday was 1,094. During the peak in early May, the state was regularly logging 2,000 to 3,000 new cases per day. The worst day, 4,014, was May 12.

Deaths per day are down some. In the first week of July, the state averaged 20 deaths per day. In the past week, the average was 15. Death rates are often several weeks behind case rates, so the numbers could rise in coming weeks.

Walmart, other stores go all-in on masks. Walmart [announced this week](#) that while many stores have required face coverings to comply with local or state mandates, the company will now make masks required in all its stores starting Monday, July 20. Company officials said: "We know this is a simple step everyone can take for their safety and the safety of others in our facilities. According to the CDC, face coverings help decrease the spread of COVID-19, and because the virus can be spread by people who don't have symptoms and don't know they are infected, it's critically important for everyone to wear a face covering in public and social distance."

Walmart is not alone. Jewel-Osco officials [announced last week](#) that all stores will require customers to wear masks starting Tuesday. [Target](#) will require customers to wear face coverings starting Aug. 1.

CDC: How Cook County Jail contained outbreak. Sheriff Tom Dart announced Wednesday that a CDC study found the department's "aggressive, comprehensive measures" were able to contain an outbreak of COVID-19 at the jail "even as cases in the surrounding community continued to rise." Currently, just 11 of the nearly 5,000 detainees in custody at the jail are positive for the virus, and the positivity rate is below 1 percent.

Since May 15, 80 percent of the new cases have come from newly arriving detainees who were identified as positive at intake, rather than from those who were already in custody.

"Every new detainee is tested upon arrival then placed in isolation housing for 14 days and then tested again before being placed in general population," said Dr. Connie Mennella, Chair of Correctional Health for Cook County Health.



[As Temps Rise, Two Public Health Crisis Could Emerge: 'It's a Deadly Combination'](#)

July 18, 2020

Even as Chicagoans grapple with the coronavirus pandemic residents now may have to contend with another heat wave this weekend.

Temperatures [could feel like 105 Saturday and Sunday](#), according to the National Weather Service. Chicagoans should prepare for the heat by drinking more water and staying in air conditioning, when possible.

Additionally, the city will provide socially distanced cooling centers across the city. [Find one in your area here.](#)

Twenty years ago, the city was hit with a devastating heat wave that killed more than 700 people. People in disadvantaged communities, the elderly and people with disabilities comprised the majority of the victims. Many had no air conditioning. Others did not want to keep their doors and windows open for fear of crime.

Black residents made up one-third of the death toll.

The pandemic similarly has had a disproportionate effect on Black and Latino communities, as well as older people with greater risk of severe complications. [However, it is young adults aged 18 to 29](#) who are driving increases in confirmed infections in Chicago and the state.

Dr. Steven Aks, an emergency room doctor at Cook County Health System, said the high temperatures amid a deadly pandemic is a unique circumstance.

"I think that makes this a very different summer than really most people have experienced in their lifetime," Aks said.

Elderly people are more at risk for heat stroke and heat-related illnesses, Aks said.

Dr. Sabrina McCormick, associate professor of environmental and occupational health at George Washington University, said extended exposure to extreme heat quickly can lead to ill effects.

McCormick said certain populations of people are more at risk when weather conditions are so extreme. The lack of air conditioning poses an even greater risk as the pandemic urges people to spend most of their time indoors, McCormick said.

"The correlation between race, class and heat has not changed much when we look at the national scale," McCormick said. "We really are very concerned for the potential of disproportionate or unequal effects of heat on different populations and different demographic groups including African Americans and Latinos."

The heat might tempt you not to wear a mask when outside. Don't give into that impulse, Aks says.

"Wearing a mask is challenging for some people. However, it's of such importance for the public health response for people to wear masks and prevent the spread of infection. Adding heat on top of that will provide additional challenges," Aks said.

Aks said people should not avoid seeking out medical care for heat-related illness because of pandemic-related fears. Cook County Health System has adapted its care so it can be safer for patients, Aks said.

"I really want to encourage people to know that things are safe at the hospital. We want them to come in, we're happy to take care of them," Aks said. "We've figured out systems to where we can separate COVID suspect patients from not, so I want to encourage people to access healthcare at this time."

McCormick urged people to remain alert about heat conditions overnight, because the temperatures may not ease up as much as people expect.

"The normal cycle of heat and cool exposure is that it's hotter during the day and cooler at night," McCormick said. "This is no longer true in cities a lot of the time because of what's called the urban heat island effect."

"And so in those kinds of contexts, the city actually absorbs the heat during the day and releases it at night."

Experts say regularly drinking water and avoiding caffeine and alcohol to stay hydrated is critical for avoiding heat-related illness.

If you have to be outside, physicians say wear light, loose-fitting clothing, put on hats and avoid dark-colored clothes. When outside, it can also help to wear sunscreen — don't forget to get the back of your neck, ears and the top of your head if bald — and to take regular breaks to cool off.

Be alert for signs of overheating and dehydration in yourself and others: headaches, dizziness, weakness, muscle cramps and really moist or cool skin. Those are all signs of heat exhaustion, according to Dr. Jenny Lu, a physician with Cook County Health. If you feel these symptoms, you should go somewhere to cool off "immediately."

Symptoms of heat stroke, a life-threatening condition, also include being weak and confused, Lu said.



[Illinois Reports 1,276 New Coronavirus Cases, 18 Deaths, and Sets New Testing Record](#)

July 18, 2020

Another 1,276 Illinoisans have tested positive for the coronavirus and 18 more have died, the Illinois Department of Public health said Saturday. An additional 46,099 tests were performed, breaking the record of 43,692 set Friday and marking the third consecutive day of more than 40,000 tests. To date, more than 2.2 million tests have been conducted in Illinois.

Saturday marks the state's fourth consecutive day in which more than 1,000 new cases of COVID-19 were confirmed. After falling below 1,000 new cases per day from June 6 to July 8, this month has so far seen seven days above 1,000.

Despite that spike, the state's seven-day average positivity rate for coronavirus tests has remained relatively low and stable. Saturday's rolling average was reported at 2.9%. The average positivity rate each day over the past week has been 3% or 3.1%.

The state health department says 1,360 people were in an Illinois hospital as of Friday night because of COVID-19, with 326 of those in intensive care units and 119 on ventilators.

Of the cases reported Saturday, 244 infections and eight deaths were in the city of Chicago.

Chicago Public Schools officials on Friday announced its [much-anticipated framework for reopening schools in the fall](#). The current plan, subject to change, calls for a mix of in-person and online learning depending upon age groups, although parents will be allowed to keep their children entirely at home.

Cook County on Friday announced that people traveling to the county from a designated COVID-19 hot spot [will have to quarantine for two weeks](#); the order parallels a quarantine order [Chicago issued earlier this month](#).

"Our positivity rates are quite low, but that can change, as we have seen in neighboring states," said Dr. Kiran Joshi, Cook County Department of Public Health co-lead and senior medical officer. "Prevention is the best medicine."



Visitors to Cook County Suburbs from COVID-19 Hot Spots to Quarantine for 2 Weeks

July 17, 2020

Anyone entering suburban Cook County from a COVID-19 hot spot — whether a traveler or returning resident — should quarantine for 14 days, according to a new emergency travel order issued Friday by the Cook County Department of Public Health.

The guidance mirrors an order issued by the City of Chicago earlier this month. The Cook County order covers travelers from Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Nevada, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Iowa and Oklahoma.

Exceptions will be made for essential workers, as well as residents of Evanston and Skokie. (The county health department did not immediately respond to a request for comment on why those suburbs were exempt. Evanston has its own travel guidance in place.)

The Cook County travel guidance was prompted by a surge in COVID-19 cases across the country, whereas in Illinois cases are rising only slightly after steadily decreasing earlier this month.

"We have come a long way in Cook County and Illinois and we want to keep it that way," said Dr. Rachel Rubin, Cook County Department of Public Health co-lead and senior medical officer. "It is summer and we know people want to travel, but we have to remain vigilant to keep our gains and avoid having to close places we've only just reopened."

On Friday, the Illinois Department of Public Health reported 1,384 new COVID-19 cases and 22 virus-related deaths in the 24 hours between Thursday and Friday, bringing statewide totals to 159,334 cases and 7,272 deaths. In suburban Cook County there have been 41,254 cases and 2,049 deaths to date, according to IDPH data.

"Our positivity rates are quite low, but that can change, as we have seen in neighboring states," said Dr. Kiran Joshi, Cook County Department of Public Health co-lead and senior medical officer. "Prevention is the best medicine. We ask everyone to avoid travel to the most affected areas. If you must travel, quarantine for 14 days to protect others and help us stop the spread of COVID-19."

CDCPH will update the list of states impacted by the travel order on its website on Tuesdays.



[Cook County Issues Emergency Travel Guidance With Quarantine Requirement](#)

July 17, 2020

The Cook County Department of Public Health on Friday issued emergency travel guidance directing travelers from certain states to quarantine for 14 days.

The guidance mirrors [Chicago's travel order](#), which also requires anyone visiting or returning to the city from one of 17 states to self-quarantine for two weeks.

Cook County, which includes several suburbs surrounding Chicago, will follow the same list of states as the one that took effect in the city Friday.

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Arizona
- California
- Florida
- Georgia
- Idaho
- Louisiana
- Mississippi
- North Carolina
- Nevada
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Iowa
- Oklahoma

"We have come a long way in Cook County and Illinois and we want to keep it that way," Cook County Department of Public Health Co-Lead and Senior Medical Officer, Dr. Rachel Rubin, said in a statement. "It is summer and we know people want to travel, but we have to remain vigilant to keep our gains and avoid having to close places we've only just reopened."

Chicago first issued an emergency travel order for 15 states just before the Fourth of July holiday weekend. The order took effect on July 6.

States included in the order at that time were: Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Nevada, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah. It was [updated this week](#) to include Oklahoma and Iowa.

Chicago Department of Public Health Commissioner Dr. Allison Arwady said travelers entering or returning to Chicago from "states experiencing a surge in new COVID-19 cases" will need to quarantine "for a 14-day period from the time of last contact within the identified state."

The order is set to remain in effect until further notice and the list of states is slated to be evaluated every Tuesday.

As of Thursday, there were 156,693 coronavirus cases in Illinois, 40,805 of them in suburban Cook County. Another 55,857 were reported in Chicago.

"Our positivity rates are quite low, but that can change, as we have seen in neighboring states," Cook County Department of Public Health Co-Lead and Senior Medical Officer, Dr. Kiran Joshi, said in a statement. "Prevention is the best medicine. We ask everyone to avoid travel to the most affected areas. If you must travel, quarantine for 14 days to protect others and help us stop the spread of COVID-19."

The DuPage County Health Department is [also encouraging anyone who travels out of Illinois to quarantine to 14 days](#), but it stopped short of issuing an emergency order like the one that began in Chicago.

The health department warned that such "recommendations are critical in assuring that our community members continue to reduce the risk of spreading."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "travel increases your chances of getting and spreading COVID-19."

The move comes as states across the U.S. see surges of coronavirus cases, many shutting down bars and restaurants in an effort to quell or prevent a spike.

[New cases have surged in several states](#) across the nation, setting new records almost daily, driven mostly by expanding outbreaks in the American South and West.

New York and New Jersey are also asking visitors from several states from the Carolinas to California to quarantine themselves for two weeks.

It remains unclear if the rest of Illinois will follow suit.

"Our two major international airports are in the city of Chicago," Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker said Tuesday. "We don't have a lot of international travel in the other parts of the state."



ABC 7 CHICAGO

Suburban Cook County issues emergency guidance for travelers from states with surging COVID-19 rates

July 17, 2020

Suburban Cook County has issued emergency travel guidance that mirrors orders [in Chicago](#) and other states to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The Cook County Department of Public Health announced Friday that travelers entering or returning to suburban Cook County from states reporting surging coronavirus cases should self-quarantine for two weeks. It applies to suburban Cook County, but excludes Evanston or Skokie.

Health officials said the guidance will remain in effect until further notice.

The guidance applies to travelers and suburban Cook County residents returning from the following states:

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Arizona
- California
- Florida
- Georgia
- Idaho
- Louisiana
- Mississippi
- North Carolina
- Nevada
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Iowa
- Oklahoma

The guidance applies to states with more than 15 new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents per day, over a 7-day rolling average, health officials said.

Similar to Chicago's order, there are exceptions for essential workers and other circumstances.

The full list of states, information about exceptions and further details are available at www.cookcountypublichealth.org.

"Our positivity rates are quite low, but that can change, as we have seen in neighboring states," said Dr. Kiran Joshi, Cook County Department of Public Health co-lead and senior medical officer. "Prevention is the best medicine. We ask everyone to avoid travel to the most affected areas. If you must travel, quarantine for 14 days to protect others and help us stop the spread of COVID-19."

Chicago issued [a mandatory travel quarantine order](#) earlier this month. The city said that individuals found in violation of the order are subject to fines of \$100 - \$500 per day, up to \$7,000.

Unlike Chicago, Cook County's guidance is a recommendation and will not be enforced. Travelers will not be subject to fines, the county said.

Both Chicago and Cook County health officials will update the list of affected states every Tuesday afternoon on their respective websites.



[Health Pulse: Cook County Health, Northwestern begin COVID antibody trial](#)

July 17, 2020

HOSPITALS SET TO TEST ELI LILLY ANTIBODY DRUG: Cook County Health, UChicago Medicine and Northwestern Medicine are preparing to test the safety and efficacy of a possible antibody treatment drug that may help patients with mild to moderate COVID-19.

The BLAZE-1 trial of Eli Lilly's medication, LY-CoV555, is currently seeking participants in a randomized, placebo-controlled trial where some participants will be given a one-time intravenous infusion of the medication which was derived from one of the first U.S. patients to survive COVID-19, according to a statement from Cook County Health.

Cook County Health and Northwestern Medicine officials stated in emails they are currently involved in the trial. The University of Chicago has begun the process of becoming an approved site for the trial, according to a spokeswoman.



[Coronavirus Cases At Cook County Jail Down To 11, Sheriff Says](#)

July 16, 2020

An analysis of the response to the coronavirus outbreak at Cook County Jail suggested aggressive interventions managed to reduce infection rates and prevented deaths in the detention facility, even as new cases of COVID-19 continued to rise around it.

A preprint of the paper "Outbreak of COVID-19 and Interventions in One of the Largest Jails in the United States — Cook County, IL, 2020" was released Tuesday.

The non-peer reviewed study was authored jointly by doctors from the health departments in the jail, Cook County and Chicago, as well as the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It found the roughly 5,000-detainee jail was able to contain the outbreak in the jail as the virus spread through its surroundings in March and April.

"After implementation of interventions, cases declined in detained persons and staff, even as cases increased dramatically in Chicago," the [study](#) said.

Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart held a news conference Wednesday to announce the paper's publication and conclusions.

"What was done here cannot be underestimated," Dart said. "Months ago, when these reckless, reckless people were talking about us being the hot spot — at that time were were the only ones testing anyone."

Dr. Connie Mennella, who runs the jail's health system and was a co-author of the study, said the county was fortunate to get the capability for rapid testing in April. And no other detention center in the country followed the strict double-testing procedure put in place at the jail.

"Every new detainee that comes into the community is tested, not only at intake when they enter, but they are tested again while they are housed in separate housing, and they will not be sent into the general population until they get a second test," Mennella said.

"It's paying off. Our positivity rate for the last several weeks is less than one percent. This gives us comfort."

According to the paper, 907 cases were identified among detainees and staff in March and April, with the first staffer testing positive on March 2 and the first detainee infection detected on March 18. About one in four of the asymptomatic detainees tested positive, but there were no cases detected among staffers who never showed symptoms.

The sheriff said 6,000 jail detainees had been tested so far. That compares to just 2 percent of inmates in the Illinois Department of Corrections system. Dart also said the state prison agency has also refused to accept 450 prisoners who have been ordered into its custody, forcing the jail to operate a separate building to house them as well.

"We aren't in trying to bend the curve, we're in containment now," Dart said. He noted Cook County became the first jail in the country to reinstate visitation for detainees.

And Dart criticized the county's court system, which has left some pretrial detainees jailed for up to 11 years as they await a trial date.

"You cannot have these cases lingering for a decade waiting for trial," he said. "We can't have that happening."

As of Wednesday afternoon, Dart said the jail has only 11 detainees with coronavirus, and eight of them contacted the virus before coming to jail.

According to the paper, seven detainees and two staff members died over the course of March and April.



Coronavirus Cases At Cook County Jail Down To 11, Sheriff Says

July 15, 2020

An analysis of the response to the coronavirus outbreak at Cook County Jail suggested aggressive interventions managed to reduce infection rates and prevented deaths in the detention facility, even as new cases of COVID-19 continued to rise around it.

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ABC 7 CHICAGO

[Cook County Jail coronavirus cases drop, according to CDC; attorneys, sheriff struggle for credit](#)

July 15, 2020

A new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention credited the testing and sanitation efforts at the Cook County Jail as reasons for a dramatic reduction of prisoners and staff with COVID-19.

Infection levels have fallen consistently. Less than one-half percent of those tested in the most recent week were positive.

At a news conference Wednesday, Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart said only 11 of the nearly 5,000 detainees are currently positive for COVID-19.

CDC researchers said in the spring, the county jail had "one of the largest outbreaks of COVID-19 in a congregate setting" in the U.S.

That was addressed by the jail's "early intervention" of testing and sanitation, the CDC said.

The report, which is considered preliminary because it has not yet been peer-reviewed, was authored by the CDC and medical officials from the county and city along with the University of Illinois at Chicago.

"We not only bent the curve we killed off the curve," Dart said.

At a news conference, the sheriff said the jail now stands as a model in how to contain the virus.

"In spite of all the insanity going on, and in spite of frankly some of the reckless things that were being said in the media, we stopped it with science. We stuck with science from day one," he said.

But the unveiling of the report set off a heated exchange among attorneys for inmates who sued the sheriff in federal court and Dart himself.

"I just think we should be realistic about why that happened," said Alexa Van Brunt, a lawyer with the MacArthur Justice Center.

The civil rights team that took Dart to court in April said the sheriff shouldn't be given credit for cutting the infection rate.

Van Brunt said the jail was mandated to institute social distancing and to provide COVID-19 testing, personal protective equipment and hygiene products, such as soap.

"Frankly, the reason for that is because his department was sued. And because that lawsuit related or resulted in court oversight of how the jail was handling the pandemic first as a temporary restraining order on April 9, and then preliminary injunction on April 27. And in fact, the decline of the infection directly aligns with the court intervention," Van Brunt said.

Dart said the court case did nothing but hurt the situation.

"So for them to suggest they had anything to do with this is an outright bold-faced lie, which I'm sorta getting used to. ... Some of these folks, you know, but I don't know how to say it, but it's a lie, it's a 100% made-up lie," Dart said.

A sheriff's office spokesman told the I-Team almost all of the measures the CDC cited as effective were already in place before the lawsuit was filed.

Dart said he is not on a victory lap, and his jail health director said she knows they aren't out of the woods as infection rates grow outside the jail.

The federal lawsuit is not finished. Van Brunt said if there is another outbreak they will be in court pressing for an injunction against the sheriff and trying to force additional safety protocols.

Chicago Tribune

[New CDC review finds Cook County sheriff, staff successfully stemmed rising tide of COVID-19 cases at jail](#)

July 15, 2020

The Cook County Jail successfully beat back its outbreak of COVID-19 even as the virus spread dramatically outside its walls, according to a new paper authored by medical officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and various county and city offices.

Earlier in the pandemic, the jail had “one of the largest outbreaks of COVID-19 in a congregate setting described to date,” according to the document.

But after expanded testing, mask-wearing, limiting detainee movement and opening up previously unused buildings to allow for greater distancing, the spread within the jail slowed down significantly compared with Chicago at large, the paper said.

“We not only bent our curve, we killed off the curve,” Sheriff Tom Dart said at a news conference Wednesday.

While officials could not pinpoint exactly which action was most effective, the cumulative result was successful, according to the examination of the jail.

“When this thing hit, I just threw everything I could come up with (at it),” Dart told the Tribune in an interview late Tuesday after the paper was initially made public. “... it was like, no, we’ve got to find out what we can do, and we’ve got to do it in the quickest and most massive way.”

The paper has not yet undergone peer review, and its authors include medical experts from the jail’s health center and the sheriff’s office, along with investigators from the Chicago Department of Public Health, the CDC and the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Even to an outsider’s eye, however, the drop in COVID-19 cases at the jail is significant. In March and April, the jail counted more than 900 cases among detainees and staffers, and seven detainees died at local hospitals after testing positive.

But as of Tuesday, only 11 detainees out of about 4,800 are positive, Dart said, and eight or nine of them entered the jail with the virus.

“We’re testing at the door now,” he said. “You could literally say being in the jail is one of the safest places to be right now.”

Detainees are tested upon intake, kept separate from the general population for two weeks and tested again before moving to a regular tier, said Dr. Chad Zawitz, lead physician for infectious diseases at the jail and one of the paper’s authors.

Since May, the jail has had only one symptomatic detainee who tested positive from within the regular jail population — the rest were asymptomatic, and the vast majority of positive cases were detected at intake, Zawitz said in an interview with the Tribune.

After widespread efforts among prosecutors, judges and defense attorneys to get more detainees out on bond, the jail population dropped significantly — enough to facilitate the social distancing that was effective in slowing the virus’s spread, Dart noted.

A lawsuit filed this spring by the Loevy and Loevy law firm and the MacArthur Justice Center at Northwestern University alleged Dart failed to stop a “rapidly unfolding public health disaster” at the jail, which at the time had been identified as one of the nation’s leading hot spots for coronavirus infections.

As a result, a federal judge mandated several reforms, including increased testing and social distancing.

Alexa Van Brunt, part of the team that brought the lawsuit, said the CDC review should have mentioned that a judge ordered several of the interventions.

“This wasn’t a matter of voluntary compliance or voluntary initiative,” she told the Tribune. “We should really be honest about what it took to get the infection to get under control and what it will take if there is another outbreak.”

In a statement, the sheriff’s office maintained that effective infection-control measures were in place prior to the lawsuit — a point Van Brunt has disputed — and said it was “laughable” to think that the attorneys should get credit.

“If anything, the plaintiffs’ attorneys only contribution was to hinder our ability to do more, forcing our staff to divert valuable time and energy to respond to their baseless complaints,” the statement read.

Dart this week warned the progress could be reversed if the population increases much more. There are about 438 people in county jail simply awaiting transfer to state prisons, which are still not taking new transfers due to the pandemic, he said.

"I've tested every one of them, they're in quarantine, isolation," Dart said, "... these people are free of COVID, they're not going to present a problem in downstate Illinois."

A spokeswoman for the Illinois Department of Corrections refused to comment on the continued need to bar transfers, citing pending litigation. The Illinois Sheriffs' Association has filed suit against IDOC over the issue.

The new paper also noted that jail staffers played an "important role" in bringing the virus into the jail — echoing what several activists alleged in their efforts to empty the facility. Not all staffers were tested because it was not mandatory given a national shortage of tests.

Positive COVID-19 cases among staffers "often preceded cases in detained persons," the CDC review states. Most of the jail's buildings saw a staff member test positive first, and then, a median of three days later, a detainee.

Dr. Chris Beyrer, a professor of epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said it is true testing all staff would have been ideal, but agreed it was not possible due to the shortage. Beyrer, who reviewed the CDC conclusions, also said the paper made clear that measures inside the jail did work to stop the outbreak.

Details from the paper also illuminated other concerns about the national response to the pandemic, Beyrer said, including turnaround times for test results. The first test at the jail required 10 days to get a result, for example.

County health officials have always acknowledged that a shortage of tests and lack of fast testing was an issue for the public response from the start. Early public health guidelines did not require staff to be tested, in part because of that shortage.

All staff were required to wear protective gear at the jail, have their temperatures checked and be screened — measures that appeared to work, county officials said.

"We clearly demonstrated that even without such testing (of staff), the outbreak was contained," Zawitz said.

Zawitz warned that it would be wrong to conclude that the outbreak among detainees could directly be traced to staffers. For example, officers in the general public had access to testing before detainees, he said, "so of course we're going to detect disease in a population that had access to tests first."



CDC: Cook County Jail is a model for COVID-19 control

July 15, 2020

Sheriff Tom Dart was livid in April when the New York Times described the Cook County Jail as one of the nation's top COVID hotspots.

But as of Wednesday -- with a jail population of 4,800 -- fewer than a dozen inside the jail have the virus.

"In spite of all the insanity going on and in spite of some of the reckless things that were being said in the media, we stuck with science. We stuck with science from day one," Dart said.

Through April, 900 detainees at the Cook County Jail had tested positive for the coronavirus.

"At that time, we were the only ones testing anyone, so of course we were going to have the highest numbers," Dart said.

But now, that number is down to just 11 inmates.

"And of those eleven, 8 or 9 of them came in positive from the outside. So the impactfulness of what was done here cannot be underestimated," Dart said.

In a new study, the CDC credits the jail for getting ahead of the curb on testing and then sticking with it.

Detainees are not only tested during in-take, but also before being allowed in the general population.

"This is proven to be a very important part of our containment and no other jail in the country that we know of is doing this type of testing," said Dr. Connie Mennella.

Masks are required for staff and employees, and early on, the population was strategically dispersed to unused cellblocks.

But while Dart says coronavirus is officially "contained," it is no time to take the foot off the gas.

"With the violence in the city, our population is going up. That's concerning to us cause that makes it more difficult for social distancing," he said.

Since the start of the pandemic, there have been seven COVID-19-related deaths among jail detainees and Dart says as long as the virus is here in the community, it poses a threat to the jail and that all discussed measures will remain in place.



[CDC Credits Cook County Sheriff's Department With Quick Action in Containing COVID-19 Outbreak](#)

July 15, 2020

Early in the coronavirus pandemic, the virus rapidly moved through Cook County Jail, but according to a new study released this week, quick and decisive action helped to stem the tide and bring the contagion under control.

The study, authored by doctors in the Cook County Health System and officials from Cermak Health Services and the Centers for Disease Control, pointed to multiple strategies that paid off in a big way in stemming the flow of new cases at the facility.

"We stuck with science from day one," Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart said. "As a result of that, while all around the jail the number of positives were going up on a straight trajectory, we not only bent our curve, we killed off the curve."

The study, authored by doctors in the Cook County Health System and officials from Cermak Health Services and the Centers for Disease Control, pointed to multiple strategies that paid off in a big way in stemming the flow of new cases at the facility.

"We stuck with science from day one," Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart said. "As a result of that, while all around the jail the number of positives were going up on a straight trajectory, we not only bent our curve, we killed off the curve."

The study found that the outbreak was reversed due to numerous key factors, including quarantine and isolation, limited movement of detainees and staff, the creation of an off-site isolation and quarantine facility, and aggressive testing protocols by Cermak Health Services, according to a press release.

As things stand now, just 11 of the nearly 5,000 detainees in custody at the jail are positive for the virus.

At one point, the jail had over 400 active cases of the virus in April.

Because of the facility's success in managing the virus, Cook County Jail was one of the first in the nation to allow visitations to resume, and is now doing approximately 100 per day. Dart says this decision has had a remarkable impact on the mood of those inside the jail walls.

In summing up the successes of the Cook County Sheriff's Department, the CDC credits aggressive action on the part of officials for the downturn in cases.

"Effective response to the COVID-19 outbreak at CCJ demonstrates the need for dynamic and aggressive application of intervention strategies, but also shows how timely response can reduce case counts and prevent morbidity and mortality in correctional or detention facilities," the study says.

Still, officials say they are prepared to battle the virus again if there is a resurgence in cases.

"We are not out of the woods, and we will remain vigilant," Connie Mennella, chair of correctional health, said.



[Study finds pandemic response at Cook County Jail could serve as model for other prisons, nursing homes](#)

July 15, 2020

While Cook County Jail was once called one of the worst COVID-19 hotspots in the country, Sheriff Tom Dart said Wednesday they have nearly wiped out the virus.

With nearly 5,000 inmates remaining in the jail there are now only 11 positive cases among them, with all of the infected individuals detained in a special unit.

"We not only bent our curve, we killed off the curve," Dart said.

At its peak from March 1 to April 30, Dart said there were more than 900 COVID-19 cases among detainees and staff. A total of nine people died.

Dart said months of hard work and planning has paid off, and now those numbers have plummeted.

"We stuck with science from day one: testing, isolating, with new places to house people, social distancing, masking people; we did all that," Dart said.

WATCH ABOVE: Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart and health officials discuss a new CDC study examining the coronavirus outbreak at Cook County Jail and how containment measures led to a "dramatic reduction" in the spread of the disease

Dart's response to the spread of coronavirus in the jail became the subject of criticism and multiple lawsuits after the first cases were discovered in March.

The family of Jefferey Pendleton, the first detainee from the jail who died of COVID-19, [filed a lawsuit](#) against the county and sheriff over how he was treated in the hospital.

As inmates [put up signs in their windows](#) asking for help, activists protested outside the jail and [called for the release of all inmates](#) while claiming more could die from COVID-19. A judge also [ordered the jail](#) to implement additional measures to follow CDC guidelines.

In a new study by the CDC, experts praise the jail for its aggressive intervention strategies coupled with widespread testing. They say the combined efforts have decreased the infection positivity rate from nearly 24 percent to less than one percent now.

[Nonviolent offenders were released from the jail](#) early on in the outbreak to reduce its population, with some put on electronic monitoring. Governor JB Pritzker also signed an executive order to [stop new inmates from being admitted](#) to state prisons during the pandemic, with only a few exceptions.

Officials also implemented measures including moving inmates to single-person cells, and halting visitation and programming.

"Inmates are tested in intake while in separate housing and not allowed into the general population until a second test," said Connie Minella, Chair of Correctional Health. "This has proven to be an important part of our containment; no other jail is doing this type of testing."

The CDC says this plan should serve as a model to jails, prison, nursing homes and other congregate settings. Cook County Jail officials say they can't let their guard down yet.

"The virus is still out there and as this virus is still spreading throughout this country, that concerns us we are not in a bubble here," Dart said.



[CDC Study Finds Measures Taken by Cook County Sheriff Mitigated COVID-19 Spread in Jail](#)

July 15, 2020

Through the use of “aggressive intervention strategies” and widespread testing, the Cook County Sheriff’s Office was able to successfully mitigate the spread of COVID-19 inside the Cook County Jail, [according to a new study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Penned by members of the CDC as well as medical officials from Cook County Health, the Chicago Department of Public Health and the Sheriff’s Office itself, the report found that jail staff were able to limit the spread of the coronavirus through physical distancing, limiting movement and expanded testing.

“Early in the outbreak, increases in cases among staff and detained persons paralleled that in Chicago, Illinois,” the report states. “After implementation of interventions, cases declined in detained persons and staff, even as cases increased dramatically in Chicago.”

Within two months of the first confirmed COVID-19 case at the jail in March, nearly 1,000 detainees and jail staffers had been infected with the disease, and seven detainees, three correctional officers and one court deputy died after testing positive.

The report called this “one of the largest outbreaks of COVID-19 in a congregate setting described to date.” Since then, the number of positive cases at the jail have dropped off precipitously.

Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart on Wednesday said [only 11 of the jail’s 4,831 detainees are currently infected with COVID-19](#), and eight or nine of those people tested positive before they were arrested.

“The impactfulness of what was done here cannot be underestimated,” he said during a press conference.

Dart has said his office began screening incoming detainees for flu-like symptoms in late January, while also setting up quarantine and isolation wards for those who did test positive for COVID-19. The sheriff said jail staff have given detainees soap, hand sanitizer and masks, while the Sheriff’s Office added 500 beds of isolation housing in an “inmate bootcamp” located away from the main jail campus to help relieve pressure on its Cermak Hospital.

Jail staff test all incoming detainees, as well as those who are both symptomatic and asymptomatic inside the jail.

In-person visitation was also halted for months, but [has since resumed in an outdoor setting](#) as the number of cases in the jail continues to decline.

The report states that the effective response to the jail’s COVID-19 outbreak “demonstrates the need for dynamic and aggressive application of intervention strategies.”

Dr. Connie Mennella, chair of correctional health for Cook County Health and one of the authors of the report, said it wasn’t necessarily any one of these measures that helped stem the spread of COVID-19, but rather a “layering” effect caused by each of them working in unison.

“We are not out of the woods and we will remain vigilant,” she said. “Understand that COVID still exists in the community, and as long as it exists in the community, it poses a threat to our environment. But we hope that we can help other congregant settings learn from what we did in the jail.”

Included with the report is a note which states it has not yet been peer reviewed. Thus the new medical research it outlined “has yet to be evaluated and ... should not be used to guide clinical practice.”

During the pandemic, Dart’s office was sued in federal court by local activists [seeking the release of older and medically vulnerable detainees](#). And in April, [the New York Times dubbed the Cook County Jail the “largest-known source of coronavirus infections.”](#)

Dart has called that claim “reckless,” saying the only reason his jail had higher numbers was because they began testing earlier than other correctional facilities.

“In spite of all the insanity going on, and in spite of frankly some of the reckless things that were being said in the media, we stuck with the science,” he said. “We stuck with science from day one, we stuck with science for testing, with isolating, with coming up with new places to house people, social distance people, mask people – we did all that.”



[Coronavirus Cases At Cook County Jail Down To 11, Sheriff Says](#)

July 15, 2020

An analysis of the response to the coronavirus outbreak at Cook County Jail suggested aggressive interventions managed to reduce infection rates and prevented deaths in the detention facility, even as new cases of COVID-19 continued to rise around it.

A preprint of the paper, titled "Outbreak of COVID-19 and Interventions in One of the Largest Jails in the United States — Cook County, IL, 2020," was released Tuesday.

The non-peer reviewed study was authored jointly by doctors from the health departments in the jail, Cook County and Chicago, as well as the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It found the roughly 5,000-detainee jail was able to contain the outbreak in the jail as the virus spread through its surroundings in March and April.

"After implementation of interventions, cases declined in detained persons and staff, even as cases increased dramatically in Chicago," the [study](#) said.

Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart held a news conference Wednesday to announce the paper's publication and conclusions.

"What was done here cannot be underestimated," Dart said. "Months ago, when these reckless, reckless people were talking about us being the hot spot — at that time we were the only ones testing anyone."

Dr. Connie Mennella, who runs the jail's health system and was a co-author of the study, said the county was fortunate to get the capability for rapid testing in April. And no other detention center in the country followed the strict double-testing procedure put in place at the jail.

"Every new detainee that comes into the community is tested, not only at intake when they enter, but they are tested again while they are housed in separate housing, and they will not be sent into the general population until they get a second test," Mennella said. "It's paying off. Our positivity rate for the last several weeks is less than one percent. This gives us comfort."

According to the paper, 907 cases were identified among detainees and staff in March and April, with the first staffer testing positive on March 2 and the first detainee infection detected on March 18. About one in four of the asymptomatic detainees tested positive, but there were no cases detected among staffers who never showed symptoms.

The sheriff said 6,000 jail detainees had been tested so far. That compares to just 2 percent of inmates in the Illinois Department of Corrections system. Dart also said the state prison agency has refused to accept 450 prisoners who have been ordered into its custody, forcing the jail to operate a separate building to house them as well.

"We aren't in trying to bend the curve, we're in containment now," Dart said. He noted Cook County became the first jail in the country to reinstate visitation for detainees.

And Dart criticized the county's court system, which has left some pretrial detainees jailed for up to 11 years as they await a trial date.

"You cannot have these cases lingering for a decade waiting for trial," he said. "We can't have that happening."

As of Wednesday afternoon, Dart said the jail has only 11 detainees with coronavirus, and eight of them contacted the virus before coming to jail.

According to the paper, seven detainees and two staff members died over the course of March and April.



ABC 7 CHICAGO

Vaccine COVID-19: Over 50K sign up to join UIC-led coronavirus study

July 15, 2020

More than 50,000 people have signed up in just two days nationwide for a new phase of vital research set to begin in Chicago.

And it seems there are encouraging results coming from the first COVID-19 vaccine tested in the U.S.

Chicago is set to be part of a 30,000-person nationwide study led locally by the University of Illinois at Chicago.

It's to test whether a new vaccine developed by Moderna and the National Institutes of Health actually works to protect against the coronavirus in the real world. Dr. Richard Novak is the lead trial investigator at UIC.

"We're going to select people for the study who are at risk for COVID-19," Novak said. "In the end, we're going to try to see if there are fewer symptomatic cases in the vaccine arm versus the placebo arm. That would be the measure of success."

A report released this week from the New England Journal of Medicine found Moderna's experimental vaccine revved up the immune system the way scientists hoped it would.

"It really induces a very potent immune response which can neutralize the virus in the laboratory," Novak said.

Doctors are looking for a diverse trial group, recruiting first responders and in Black and Latino neighborhoods. But, that's far from the only vaccine being tested.

There are 23 candidate vaccines in clinical evaluation right now, according to the World Health Organization.

That includes one from pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, with trials starting at Cook County Health in August. Doctors there say it's shown promise against COVID-19 in animals.

"If we think about how fast, going from sequencing this virus to vaccine that can be tested in humans, in such a short amount of time, and under three months, (it) has been really amazing to see," said Dr. Ronald Lubelchek, attending infectious diseases doctor with Cook County Health.

It's a worldwide race for a COVID-19 solution, and you can help here in Chicago.

"I think that the approach of having multiple possible vaccine candidates will hopefully get us to where we need to be," Lubelchek said.

If you want to be a part of the nationwide vaccine trials, you can head to coronaviruspreventionnetwork.org to volunteer to be a part of testing a solution. Trials at UIC should start near the end of the month.



[Health Pulse: Opioid deaths spike](#)

July 15, 2020

COOK COUNTY OVERDOSE DEATHS ON THE RISE: There were 773 opioid-related deaths between Jan. 1 and July 13, up 28 percent from the same period last year, according to Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Ponni Arunkumar. That doesn't include 580 pending cases, of which 70 to 80 percent are expected to be opioid-related.

While fatalities have increased, there has not been an uptick in the number of people going to the emergency department for help, suggesting that people are avoiding care during the pandemic, said Dr. Steven Aks, an emergency room doctor and chief of toxicology for Cook County Health.

The area is on track to double the number of opioid-related deaths it saw last year.



[Officials: Cook County opioid-related deaths on increase](#)

July 14, 2020

Opioid-related deaths in 2020 in Cook County have passed numbers from last year at this time, officials said.

The Cook County medical examiner's office has confirmed 773 deaths between Jan. 1 and July 13. The number was 605 during the same period in 2019.

Results for another 580 cases this year are pending. Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Ponni Arunkumar said Tuesday in a release that 70%-80% will be confirmed as opioid overdoses.

Cook County had 1,267 confirmed opioid overdose deaths in 2019 and 1,148 in 2018.

African Americans and Latinos account for 63% of the 773 cases confirmed so far this year.

[Opioid Overdoses Keep Surging in Chicago, Killing Black People on the West Side](#)

July 14, 2020

Cook County residents continue to die at a staggering rate from opioid-related overdoses, and Black residents from Chicago's West Side account for a disproportionate number of those deaths.

County political and public health officials on Tuesday sounded the alarm about what they said was a preventable crisis that has been overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Whatever crisis faces our communities, people of color bear the brunt of it," Toni Preckwinkle, the Cook County Board president, said at a news conference. "These compounding public health crises show the existing inequities in our system and their disproportionate impact on communities that already struggle with disinvestment, lack of resources, violence and poverty."

ProPublica Illinois [first reported on the spike in opioid deaths](#) in May and highlighted how the pandemic, which has killed more than 7,000 people in Illinois, has exacerbated an already fatal epidemic. The victims of both crises are disproportionately Black.

As of Tuesday, more than 1,180 Cook County residents have died or are suspected to have died from opioid-related overdoses this year, according to a ProPublica Illinois analysis of data from the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office. That's about twice the number of people who died because of opioids during the same period last year.

Half of the confirmed opioid-related deaths have been among Black people, even though Black residents make up less than a quarter of the county's population. Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, the county's chief medical examiner, said the majority of victims are on Chicago's West Side, including in the Austin, East Garfield Park and West Garfield Park neighborhoods.

The number of overdose deaths began to rise months before the spread of the coronavirus, but the pandemic has added new challenges, and not just in Cook County. ProPublica Illinois reported previously that other areas of the state and cities across the country have seen increased opioid-related deaths. Experts say several factors have contributed to the crisis, including financial stress, desperation and people using opioids without someone nearby to administer naloxone, an overdose-reversal drug.

What's more, fewer people are coming to the emergency room to seek help, in large part out of fear of contracting COVID-19, said Dr. Steven Aks, an emergency room physician at John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County and chief of toxicology for Cook County Health. He stressed that hospitals are safe and urged people to call 911 in the event of an overdose.

"What we'd like to say is that it's safe here. That's the most important message," he said. "If they make it to our care, they will likely live."

County officials said they are working to get more naloxone to syringe exchange programs, local clinics and law enforcement agencies. Still, Dr. Kiran Joshi, a senior medical officer at the Cook County Department of Public Health, acknowledged that there is not enough naloxone available in the neighborhoods that most need it. He added that the county is using federal and state grant money to increase the local naloxone supply.

Opioid-related deaths in Cook County have doubled since this time last year, and similar increases are happening across the country. "If you're alone, there's nobody to give you the Narcan," said one coroner.

"It's important to blanket the community with as much naloxone as possible," he said. But "what we've found is that the communities where we see the most overdoses happening, among the most vulnerable populations, do not have the naloxone that they need. So this is a significant need."

The soaring death toll means the state likely will not meet its goal of reducing the number of projected opioid deaths in 2020 by one-third. State Rep. La Shawn K. Ford, a Chicago Democrat whose district includes Austin, said in an interview that communities need more resources for substance abuse and mental health treatment, as well as outreach. Some residents, he said, don't even know naloxone exists.

"The state, the city and the county should treat the opioid crisis and heroin crisis as the pandemic that it is," he said.

COVID-19, he said, cannot eclipse the fight against opioids.

"We have to make sure we don't let the heroin and opioid crisis be forgotten," he said. "We see what happens when we lose sight of it."



ABC 7 CHICAGO

[Chicago area opioid overdose deaths spike amid COVID-19 pandemic](#)

July 14, 2020

There's been an "exponential" increase in opioid overdose deaths in the Chicago area amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Cook County is on track to double the number of opioid-related deaths from 2019, officials said at a press conference Tuesday. While African Americans make up under 24% of the county's population, they account for half of all opioid deaths in the county this year.

"This year continues to showcase the dangerous consequences we face as a result of decades - centuries - of racial inequities," said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. "While much of this year has been consumed by our fight to contain COVID-19, which has disproportionately impacted our communities of color, we've had to contend with skyrocketing homicide rates which almost universally took the lives of Black and Brown people and we must face the devastating toll the opioid crisis is taking on our community as well."

Last year, the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office confirmed 605 opioid overdose deaths between January 1 and July 13. This year, that number stands at 773.

Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Ponni Arunkumar said that doesn't include the 70-80 percent of pending cases she believes will ultimately be confirmed as opioid overdoses. She estimated there are already approximately 1,200 opioid toxicity deaths in Cook County this year.

"Sixty-three percent Black and Latino, 45-55 year olds are most likely to succumb to an opioid overdose and 55-64 years olds are second most likely to die from an opioid overdose," she said.

While opioid overdose deaths have spiked, emergency rooms across Cook County Health have not reported any uptick in opioid-related visits.

"This is extremely alarming because an opioid overdose patient will likely live if given naloxone in the ambulance and opioid overdose deaths in the emergency department are a rare event," said Dr. Steve Aks, division chair of emergency medicine and toxicology at Cook County Health, . "Due to the pandemic, we asked individuals to stay at home unless it is an emergency - an overdose is an emergency."

Fighting COVID-19 means isolation, but being alone promotes substance abuse for those who are vulnerable, especially those in the early days of recovery. The isolation strategy provides a predictable conundrum according to a leading addiction services provider.

"The interaction between COVID-19, the fear of COVID-19, and substance use and addiction are pretty much the worst combination I have seen in my career without question," said Dr. Thomas Britton, President and CEO Gateway Foundation.

"So many people are equipped with Narcan themselves. Family members and friends and emergency people and if you're not in contact with those folks the Narcan is not around so you're not going to have that sort of remedy available," said Mike Mahoney from Hazelden Betty Ford Clinic.

At Chicago's Hazelden Betty Ford clinic, the pandemic forced all treatment to go virtual, adding an obstacle for those who rely on human contact to get better.

"The remedy really is to engage with people," Mahoney said. "That's the number one antidote to substance abuse and mental health problems and that's exactly what we can't do now so it's a real problem."

In the first four months of 2020, EMS calls for opioid overdoses spiked 72% from the year before, according to Chicago

Department of Public Health. At least 331 people died in that time, which is a 35% increase from 2019.

"People are scared that if they go to a treatment center they are going to develop COVID [and] if they go to outpatient, they are going to develop COVID," Britton said.

Britton's agency helps 9,000 clients per day, but since the pandemic hit in mid-March, the assistance has shifted primarily to video.

Despite moving online, there is an inevitable loss of effectiveness, and he said the drug pipeline has been altered by the pandemic.

"So the uncertainty of what you are using has increased dramatically," he said, "it has more fentanyl - 90% of the overdose deaths have fentanyl in them."

A Safe Haven, who has 25 facilities for addiction treatment in the Chicago region, stood up the first city-approved isolation center for the homeless battling addiction.

"To have people that are diagnosed with behavioral health care issues or opiate overdose issues, to a place that is actually designed to help them get on a path to recovery, jobs and permanent housing," said A Safe Haven Founder, Neli Vazquez Rowland about their efforts.

The doctor and administrator both believe opioid overdoses are only going to increase as the pandemic marches on. They say the answer is to remember services are still there to help, and people need to solicit care for the ones they love that they know have a problem.

While it is a bit more challenging to find these days, there is still help out there. Those in need can call the Statewide helpline 833-2FINDHELP to be connected to treatment resources in your area.



[Opioid Overdoses Keep Surging in Chicago, Killing Black People On The West Side](#)

July 15, 2020

Cook County residents continue to die at a staggering rate from opioid-related overdoses, and Black residents from Chicago's West Side account for a disproportionate number of those deaths.

County political and public health officials on Tuesday sounded the alarm about what they said was a preventable crisis that has been overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Whatever crisis faces our communities, people of color bear the brunt of it," Toni Preckwinkle, the Cook County Board president, said at a news conference. "These compounding public health crises show the existing inequities in our system and their disproportionate impact on communities that already struggle with disinvestment, lack of resources, violence and poverty."

ProPublica Illinois [first reported on the spike in opioid deaths](#) in May and highlighted how the pandemic, which has killed more than 7,000 people in Illinois, has exacerbated an already fatal epidemic. The victims of both crises are disproportionately Black.

As of Tuesday, more than 1,180 Cook County residents have died or are suspected to have died from opioid-related overdoses this year, according to a ProPublica Illinois analysis of data from the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office. That's about twice the number of people who died because of opioids during the same period last year.

Half of the confirmed opioid-related deaths have been among Black people, even though Black residents make up less than a quarter of the county's population. Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, the county's chief medical examiner, said the majority of victims are on Chicago's West Side, including in the Austin, East Garfield Park and West Garfield Park neighborhoods.

The number of overdose deaths began to rise months before the spread of the coronavirus, but the pandemic has added new challenges, and not just in Cook County. ProPublica Illinois reported previously that other areas of the state and cities across the country have seen increased opioid-related deaths. Experts say several factors have contributed to the crisis, including financial stress, desperation and people using opioids without someone nearby to administer naloxone, an overdose-reversal drug.

What's more, fewer people are coming to the emergency room to seek help, in large part out of fear of contracting COVID-19, said Dr. Steven Aks, an emergency room physician at John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County and chief of toxicology for Cook County Health. He stressed that hospitals are safe and urged people to call 911 in the event of an overdose.

"What we'd like to say is that it's safe here. That's the most important message," he said. "If they make it to our care, they will likely live."

County officials said they are working to get more naloxone to syringe exchange programs, local clinics and law enforcement agencies. Still, Dr. Kiran Joshi, a senior medical officer at the Cook County Department of Public Health, acknowledged that there is not enough naloxone available in the neighborhoods that most need it. He added that the county is using federal and state grant money to increase the local naloxone supply.

"It's important to blanket the community with as much naloxone as possible," he said. But "what we've found is that the communities where we see the most overdoses happening, among the most vulnerable populations, do not have the naloxone that they need. So this is a significant need."

The soaring death toll means the state likely will not meet its goal of reducing the number of projected opioid deaths in 2020 by one-third. State Rep. La Shawn K. Ford, a Chicago Democrat whose district includes Austin, said in an interview that communities need more resources for substance abuse and mental health treatment, as well as outreach. Some residents, he said, don't even know naloxone exists.

"The state, the city and the county should treat the opioid crisis and heroin crisis as the pandemic that it is," he said.

COVID-19, he said, cannot eclipse the fight against opioids.

"We have to make sure we don't let the heroin and opioid crisis be forgotten," he said. "We see what happens when we lose sight of it."



[Cook County On Track To Double Number Of Opioid Deaths Compared To 2019](#)

July 14, 2020

Cook County's drug crisis is exploding.

Heroin and other opioid overdoses are up 50%. And the coronavirus appears to be a major factor.

"We are on track to double the number of opioid-related deaths we saw last year," said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. "African Americans make up 24% of the county's population, but half of the overdose opioid deaths this year."

The Cook County Board President said the county had over 1,200 opioid deaths last year, but we have had more than 1,200 so far this year.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

[A third scourge quietly stalks Cook County — officials see doubling of ‘needless, preventable’ opioid deaths](#)

July 14, 2020

A third scourge quietly stalks Cook County — officials see doubling of ‘needless, preventable’ opioid deaths

Last year the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office handled 605 opioid overdose deaths between January 1 and July 13. This year that number is 773, though that only tells part of the story, Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, the county’s medical examiner, said.

In the clutches of a deadly pandemic and a rise in street violence, Cook County is also on track to double the number of opioid overdose deaths it saw last year, officials said Tuesday, “sounding the alarm” on yet another crisis.

Last year the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office handled 605 opioid overdose deaths between January 1 and July 13. This year that number is 773, though that only tells part of the story, Dr. Ponni Arunkumar said.

“We also have 580 pending cases,” the medical examiner said. “We know that traditionally 70[%] to 80% of those cases will wind up being ruled as opioid overdose deaths. This means that there are 400 to 465 more opioid deaths thus far this year. Realistically, just six and a half months into 2020, we already have more than 1,200 opioid-related deaths.”

Those who have died are “overwhelmingly people of color,” Arunkumar said. Of the 773 deaths so far this year, 63% have been Black or Latino. Many are also 45 years old or older — 45- to 55-year-olds, as well as 55- to 64-year-olds are the two age groups that are most likely to “succumb to an opioid overdose death,” Arunkumar said.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said the county must be a voice for preventing “future, needless, preventable deaths plaguing our community.”

“Our county and our nation are facing a number of alarming challenges,” Preckwinkle said. “The victims of the opioid epidemic have been quietly dying around us.”

The Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office has seen a substantial growth in all cases — it handles the second most cases in the country, just after Los Angeles. In an average year, Cook County handles 6,300 deaths from all causes. Just six and a half months into the year, the office has handled 8,000 cases, and will soon hit 9,000, due in part to the coronavirus pandemic and the gun violence the city and county have seen in recent months.

The number of opioid cases the county has seen has also grown, telling a “grim story,” Arunkumar said.

In 2019, Arunkumar’s office handled a total of 1,267 opioid deaths, compared with 1,148 the year before.

Dr. Steven Aks, the director of toxicology at Cook County Health, said that while there’s been an increase in the number of people dying there’s been a decrease in the number of people coming to emergency rooms.

County officials offered no theories on why those suffering from overdoses are not showing up at the ER. But they made it clear that that decision could mean the difference between life and death.

“What we’d like to say is that it’s safe here — that’s the most important message,” Aks said. “This is extremely alarming with respect to opioid overdoses, because for each EMS run that a paramedic brings a patient to the hospital, if they make it to our care, they will likely live, and that’s very important for individuals to know — the patients given naloxone in the ambulance or at the scene, they will likely survive.”

The county is working to “blanket” communities with as much naloxone, a drug that can reverse an overdose, as possible, though there’s not nearly enough of the drug in communities, said Dr. Kiran Joshi, one of the leaders of the county’s Department of Public Health. The county is working on building partnerships with law enforcement and linking people to care, Joshi said.

“While it’s not super expensive, it’s not cheap either, and so what we’ve found is that communities — often the communities where we have the most overdoses happening among the most vulnerable populations — do not have the naloxone that they need. So, there’s a significant need.”

The county’s medical examiner has already handled more cases than it has last year — and the county’s death toll in 2020 is higher than in 2019 due to a mixture of natural causes, the pandemic, street violence and opioids, Preckwinkle said.

“All of those things together have had a devastating impact on the health of our community,” Preckwinkle said. “And I think we can anticipate that we will continue to see, if not the magnitude of deaths from COVID-19 we’ve seen this summer, but an uptick in the fall, an echo or a second wave.

“And as you have seen, we continue to struggle with the violence, particularly in the streets of Chicago, and we’re here today to talk about the opioid overdose crisis as well. So, the pandemic continues, and the violence continues, and we continue to see the overdoses. I’m not sure anybody can predict what the exact magnitude of that challenge is going to be, but it’s already pretty serious.”

Chicago Tribune

[Cook County opioid deaths tell ‘grim story’ as fatalities on track to double from last year, chief medical examiner says](#)

July 14, 2020

Cook County is grappling with twice the amount of reported opioid-related deaths compared with this period last year, the medical examiner’s office announced Tuesday amid skyrocketing caseloads during the coronavirus outbreak.

In 2020, the county’s deaths ruled as opioid overdoses are on track to double last year’s total number of opioid-related cases, the chief medical examiner, Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, said at a Tuesday news conference. The fatalities, similar to those from the coronavirus and gun violence crises, are disproportionately affecting Black people, she added. The majority stem from Chicago’s West Side neighborhoods.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said the briefing was convened “to sound the alarm” as the three overlapping epidemics devastate the county’s most vulnerable populations.

“This year continues to illuminate the dangerous consequences we face as a result of centuries — centuries — of racial inequity,” Preckwinkle said. “The victims of the opioid epidemic have been quietly dying around us. We must be their voice to prevent future, needless, preventable deaths plaguing our community.”

Between Jan. 1 and Monday, 773 opioid overdose deaths were logged in Cook County, with 580 more pending cases, Arunkumar said. Given that about 70% to 80% of pending cases are ruled as opioid-related, that means about 1,200 such deaths are expected to be tallied for that time period, Arunkumar said.

Last year, there were 605 opioid overdose deaths from Jan. 1 to July 13, and by the end of the year, 1,267 cases were confirmed to be opioid-related, Arunkumar said. That number was 1,148 in 2018.

Out of the confirmed 773 cases so far this year, 63% of the victims were Black and/or Latino, with 45- to 55-year-old males most likely to die from an overdose, Arunkumar said. Fentanyl, an exponentially deadlier synthetic opioid, was blamed for the majority of cases.

“The numbers tell a grim story,” Arunkumar said about the opioid overdose deaths. “We’ll never get used to the tragedy that each death represents.”

While more analysis needs to be done on the coronavirus pandemic’s effects on opioid deaths, officials worry that the isolation and health scares are keeping people experiencing overdoses from seeking help. Emergency department volumes have decreased since the pandemic started, said Dr. Steven Aks, division chair of emergency medicine and toxicology at Cook County Health.

“What we’d like to say is that it’s safe here. That’s the most important message,” Aks said. “This is extremely alarming with respect to the opioid overdoses. Because for each EMS run that a paramedic brings a patient to the hospital, if they make it to our care they will likely live.”

As Cook County Health emergency room visits related to opioid overdoses remained stagnant, Chicago reported a swell in EMS visits related to opioid overdoses, according to a department of public health alert. From the beginning of the year to the end of May, EMS responses went up about 67% compared with the same time in 2019.

Dr. Kiran Joshi, senior medical officer at the Cook County Department of Public Health, said a key solution is partnering with law enforcement to “blanket” communities with naloxone, the medication used to reverse opioid overdoses, because the current levels are not “nearly enough.”

On top of the opioid overdose cases, the medical examiner’s office has had to contend with spikes in gun violence homicides this year as well as the surge of deaths from the novel coronavirus. The three crises are pushing the office’s caseload to top 9,000 in the coming days — compared with 6,274 cases in all of 2019, Arunkumar said.



Officials: Cook County opioid-related deaths on the rise

July 14, 2020

Opioid-related deaths in 2020 in Cook County have passed numbers from last year at this time, officials said.

The Cook County medical examiner's office has confirmed 773 deaths between Jan. 1 and July 13. The number was 605 during the same period in 2019.

Results for another 580 cases this year are pending. Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Ponni Arunkumar said Tuesday in a release that 70 percent - 80 percent will be confirmed as opioid overdoses.

Cook County had 1,267 confirmed opioid overdose deaths in 2019 and 1,148 in 2018.

African Americans and Latinos account for 63 percent of the 773 cases confirmed so far this year.



Opioid-Related Deaths On Pace To Double In Cook County

July 14, 2020

The number of opioid-related deaths being investigated by the Cook County Medical Examiner's office has doubled in the first six months of this year compared to the same time period last year.

The medical examiner's office said Tuesday it likely has confirmed around 770 opioid deaths so far and has another 580 pending cases, most of which will likely be overdose-related. In 2019, the first half of the year marked 605 opioid-related deaths. And for all of 2019, there were 1,267 opioid-related deaths, Chief Medical Examiner Ponni Arunkumar said during a morning news conference.

Black and Latino residents make up nearly two-thirds of the overdose deaths confirmed so far this year — the same groups of people dying most of COVID-19.

"Once again, whatever crisis faces our communities, people of color bear the brunt of it," Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said Tuesday. "We're here today to sound the alarm. ... The victims of the opioid epidemic have been quietly dying around us."

Arunkumar painted the latest picture of the opioid crisis in Cook County. People ages 45 to 55 are the most likely to die of overdoses. They're typically men. The majority of people who died were on the West Side. And fentanyl bought on the street is the main culprit.

Arunkumar said she's talked to coroners in neighboring counties, and they, too, have seen a rise in opioid-related deaths compared to before the pandemic.

The medical examiner's office is one of the busiest in the country, investigating around 6,300 deaths a year. But the office only investigates around 16% of the 40,000 people who typically die in Cook County every year, primarily people who die unexpectedly, violently, or now, who are being investigated for COVID-19. People who die at home, for example, may not necessarily be autopsied by the medical examiner.

Dr. Steven Aks, a toxicologist and emergency room physician at the county's public health system, attributed the spike in overdose deaths to substance use disorders exacerbated by the pandemic.

"I think one of the perspectives I have is the why of opioid use to begin with," Aks said. "I think it ties to ... hopelessness, lack of support structures and stability. I think the pandemic exposes all sorts of structural inequalities in our society, and people who have a propensity for substance use disorder are very much more at risk for relapsing or using more."

Consider that when COVID-19 cases started to climb in the Chicago area in March, hospitals told people to stay away. They needed every bed possible to treat people infected with the new coronavirus. Now doctors, fearful that people have been putting off medical care and even dying at home, are encouraging patients to return.

The county's public health system, a medical safety net for low-income and uninsured people in the region, has not seen an uptick in opioid-related emergency room visits, despite the rise in overdoses.

Access to substance use treatment was tough before the pandemic, especially for low-income people on government-funded Medicaid health insurance, county officials pointed out.

Then when COVID-19 struck, some treatment centers for people with opioid addictions had to limit access to curb the spread of COVID-19. In-person therapy went online. Only one person instead of two to a bedroom at residential centers.

"Staying at home and keeping socially distant helps us stay safe from the coronavirus, but those precautions along with growing unemployment have a profoundly negative impact on people with substance-use disorders," Dr. Dan Lustig, CEO of the local large treatment facility, Haymarket Center, said in a statement. "The opioid crisis was compounded by the pandemic, and the spike in overdoses was anticipated by everyone in the treatment community."

Cook County officials said they plan to get more of the opioid overdose-reversing drug naloxone to communities with help from \$5 million in grants.

When asked if the county is doing enough, Preckwinkle responded: "We can always do more. We're doing the best we can."

[Preckwinkle, Cook County Officials Sound the Alarm on Rising Opioid Overdose Deaths](#)

July 14, 2020

Officials are sounding the alarm on the rising number of opioid-related deaths in Cook County, which they say is on track to see twice as many deaths from opioids in 2020 as it did in 2019.

"While much of this year has been consumed by our fight to contain COVID-19, which has disproportionately impacted our communities of color, we've had to contend with skyrocketing homicide rates which almost universally took the lives of Black and Brown people and we must face the devastating toll the opioid crisis is taking on our community as well," Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said Tuesday morning.

In 2019, there were 605 opioid-related deaths between Jan. 1 and July 13. So far this year, 773 deaths can be attributed to opioids, according to Cook County officials.

"But that only tells part of the story," said Cook County Medical Examiner Ponni Arunkumar. "We also have 580 pending cases. We know traditionally 70%-80% of cases wind up being ruled as opioid overdose deaths. ... This means this year there are (already) more than 1,200 opioid overdose-related deaths."

The medical examiner's office confirmed a total of 1,267 opioid overdose deaths in 2019, and 1,148 such deaths in 2018. The majority of the victims are people of color, according to Arunkumar.

Among the 773 people who died this year, 63% were Black or Latino, according to Arunkumar, who said people ages 45-54 were most likely to die from an opioid overdose, followed by those ages 55-64.

"Fentanyl is the culprit in the overwhelming majority of these cases," she said. "The majority of the victims (live) on the West Side in Austin and the East and West Garfield Park neighborhoods."

These deaths are "by and large preventable," said Arunkumar.

Despite the increase in opioid-related deaths, emergency rooms aren't seeing an increase in patients seeking help, according to Dr. Steve Aks, division chair of emergency medicine and toxicology at Cook County Health.

"This means people by and large are not coming to the emergency room or hospital at a point of crisis. This is very important. We've actually seen decreases in volume of emergency room (visits) since the beginning of the pandemic," Aks said. "This is extremely alarming with respect to opioid overdoses."

Hospitals and emergency rooms are safe, Aks said. "Due to the pandemic, we asked individuals to stay home unless it was an emergency. An overdose is such an emergency," he said.

Aks urges people to call 911 during an opioid overdose because paramedics can begin treating someone on the scene or en route to the hospital. "An opioid overdose death in the emergency room is a rare event," he said. "We don't want people to be afraid to come to the emergency room. We are here to serve everyone."

Patients are asking for help in other ways, however. According to officials, Cook County Health has seen a 20%-25% increase in patients seeking help for substance use.

"We are working to keep patients safe by breaking down barriers to access through telehealth visits, frequent team engagement and outreach, access to naloxone for overdose prevention, and longer prescription supplies to avoid disruptions in care," said Dr. Juleigh Nowinski Konchak, lead physician for medication assisted treatment at Cook County Health. "We have a long history of serving a vulnerable population and we see every day the toll this crisis is taking on them."

Through a collaboration between Cook County Health and the Chicago Recovery Alliance, anyone can take part in a mobile syringe exchange program and be connected with Cook County Health over the phone, according to Konchak, who said CCH clinics will begin dispensing naloxone as well.

In addition, CCH is in the process of building a partnership with law enforcement to equip them with naloxone, according to Dr. Kiran Joshi, assistant incident commander of CCH operations. "It's important to blanket the community with as much naloxone as possible," he said.

The county is also in the process of building partnerships with law enforcement that would connect people with access to care, according to Joshi.

Evanston Now

[Evanston escapes surge in Cook County opioid deaths](#)

July 14, 2020

Evanston so far seems to have largely escaped a surge in opioid deaths this year that officials say is ravaging much of Cook County.

County officials at a news conference today said the county is on track to double the number of opioid-related deaths recorded in 2019, and Black residents are disproportionately likely to become victims of the opioid epidemic.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said the increase is an example of "the dangerous consequences we face as a result of decades – centuries – of racial inequities."

"While much of this year has been consumed by our fight to contain COVID-19, which has disproportionately impacted our communities of color, we've had to contend with skyrocketing homicide rates which almost universally took the lives of Black and Brown people and we must face the devastating toll the opioid crisis is taking on our community as well."

While African Americans make up under 24% of the County's population, they account for half of all opioid deaths in the County this year.

In Evanston, where Blacks make up about 17% of the population, they have accounted for about 37% of the opioid deaths over the past five-and-a-half years.

Last year, the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office confirmed 605 opioid overdose deaths between Jan. 1 and July 13. This year, that number stands at 773. But that only tells part of the story. The Office is still awaiting results of 580 pending cases. According to Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, 70% to 80% of those cases will be confirmed as opioid overdoses.

This means that there are already about 1,200 opioid toxicity deaths in Cook County this year.

In 2019, the Medical Examiner's Office confirmed a total of 1,267 opioid overdose deaths. In 2018, the Office confirmed 1,148. The victims are overwhelmingly people of color. Of the 773 cases confirmed this year, 63 percent are Black or Latino.

Forty-five to 54-year-olds are most likely to succumb to an opioid overdose, and 55- to 64-year-olds are second most likely to die from an opioid overdose. These age groups have consistently been the most vulnerable to opioid deaths over the past few years.

"Our Office is used to dealing with death, but we will never get used to the tragedy that each death represents," said Arunkumar. "While we concentrate on our mission to establish the cause and manner of death for the cases that fall under our jurisdiction, we do not accept that they had to occur. These deaths are preventable, and we have a responsibility to do all we can to stop as many as we can."

While opioid toxicity deaths have spiked, the emergency departments at Cook County Health have seen no uptick in opioid-related emergency room visits. Dr. Steve Aks, division chair of emergency medicine and toxicology at Cook County Health, said.&

"This is extremely alarming because an opioid overdose patient will likely live if given naloxone in the ambulance and opioid overdose deaths in the emergency department are a rare event," said Dr. Aks. "Due to the pandemic, we asked individuals to stay at home unless it is an emergency – an overdose is an emergency."

One program that has gotten a more than 20 percent increase in participation is the medication assisted treatment program at Cook County Health. MAT is a combination of FDA-approved medication and behavioral health support and considered the gold standard approach to substance use disorders treatment according to Dr. Juleigh Nowinski Konchak, MAT physician lead at Cook County Health. She says Cook County Health has adapted how it is caring for patients with substance abuse disorders during the pandemic.

"We are working to keep patients safe by breaking down barriers to access through telehealth visits, frequent team-based engagement and outreach, access to naloxone for overdose prevention, and longer prescription supplies to avoid disruptions in care," said Dr. Nowinski Konchak.



[25 years after deadly heat wave, COVID-19 gives Chicago a new summer foe](#)

July 11, 2020

Dr. Cory Franklin was the head of medical intensive care at Cook County Hospital during an unforgettable five days in July 1995, when a “crisis in slow motion” swamped the emergency room.

A freakishly severe heat wave turned the city into an inferno, sending hordes of people to the hospital and more than 700 to the morgue. Franklin recalled treating a roofer whose body temperature hovered around 111 degrees, the highest he had ever seen (incredibly, the man survived).

Memories of that hellish week are stirring again 25 years later, but this time with a twist: A lingering heat wave is colliding with a pandemic, producing new risks whose gravity has yet to be determined.

“Very often very severe situations sneak up on you,” Franklin said.

The summer of 2020 has trapped Chicago between two scourges. In one corner, a deadly virus that can be easily transmitted in crowded indoor settings, especially when cooling systems are just recirculating virus-pocked air. In the other, a heat wave with the potential to kill.

Government officials have learned many lessons since 1995, and with preventive measures now in place, Cook County usually sees just a handful of heat-related deaths each year. But some worry COVID-19 could upset that progress.

The pandemic has forced people to stay home to prevent the spread of the virus, and some experts say fear of contracting the disease could keep them there even as their houses and apartments grow dangerously hot.

“What’s concerning during this pandemic is we don’t know how effective some of those strategies and measures (to combat heat deaths) can be,” said Olga Wilhelmi, a research scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research who is studying the intersection of COVID-19 and extreme heat. “Do cities make them available to use, and are people willing to use them?”

Record heat, record deaths

On July 12, 1995, after days of continuous rain, a musty heat spread across the Chicago region and temperatures soared with a record-high heat index of about 126 degrees.

Air conditioners quickly sold out. Thousands took to Lake Michigan for solace in the cool water.

The heat index climbed well past the level required to trigger the city’s emergency heat plan. But instead of raising an alarm, city leaders waited three days before warning residents.

“We all have our little problems but let’s not blow it out of proportion,” said then-Mayor Richard M. Daley. “It’s hot. ... Let’s just all work together and calm down.”

Within days, hundreds of decomposed bodies were piled into the Cook County medical examiner’s office. Overloaded with work and out of space, officials had to enlist volunteers to carry bodies from police wagons into refrigeration vans donated by Taste of Chicago.

“We had all of our people working, and many of them doing things that they didn’t normally do,” recalled Edmund Donoghue, who was Cook County’s chief medical examiner in 1995.

Most afflicted by the severe heat were the elderly, poor and minority populations, many of whom lived in homes where the cooling system, if it existed at all, was inadequate.

“These were people whose lives could’ve been saved had they been given access to air conditioning and power earlier,” said Eric Klinenberg, a sociology professor at New York University and author of the book “Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago.”

He added: “In the poor, segregated neighborhoods, especially on the South Side and the West Side, the suffering was overwhelming, and the death rate was enormous.”

Although the elderly accounted for most of the victims, there were exceptions. On July 14, as the temperature rose to an unbearable degree, a home-based day care provider took a group of children to the movies and McDonald’s before returning home and accidentally leaving two of the kids — Geno Rouse and Kenneth Brown — in her van for two hours.

The children died. The day care provider faced criminal charges and was sentenced to two years of probation.

Geno's mother, Atondra Rouse, now a 58-year-old Chicago Public Schools teacher, said she recalls her son's death every time she gets in a hot car.

"Even with the air on, I have to roll down my windows," she said. "I have to have air coming in."

Heat meets COVID

The 1995 heat wave ebbed after five days, leaving an estimated death toll of 739 people. But its impact lived on, as Chicago officials crafted an emergency heat response, implemented outreach efforts for seniors and established telephone banks to prevent future heat disasters.

"It got the politicians and public health people to realize that something like this could be a major emergency," Franklin said.

Donoghue said the main takeaway was the importance of air conditioning.

"Nobody who had an air conditioner who used it died," he said. "So where we saw deaths were with people who either didn't have air conditioning, or had it but didn't want to turn it on because it was too expensive to pay the electricity bill."

That is a particular concern in COVID-ravaged 2020, when thousands of city residents have lost their jobs. In the face of the pandemic, Chicago has announced a bill relief program for water and sewer services it controls, but not power, which is provided by ComEd.

The utility did not respond to the Tribune's request for comment.

Elise Gout, research associate with the energy and environment team at the Center for American Progress, said extreme heat, like COVID-19, reveals structural inequities, and the combination compounds them.

"The idea of forcing these families to make a choice between the security of their homes in a pandemic and finding a cooler area is unacceptable," she said.

Dr. Emily Landon, a COVID-19 expert at University of Chicago Medicine, said air conditioning can present its own problems, noting a theory that the pandemic has flared in the Sun Belt because people are avoiding scorching summer temperatures by congregating in cool but poorly ventilated indoor spaces.

But while it's safer to be outside — heat and humidity create an inhospitable atmosphere for the virus, she said — Chicago's beaches and public pools remain closed for fear of attracting dangerously large crowds. Landon said she still thinks that's a good idea.

"Those crowded pool scenes from Memorial Day, I think we all agree we don't need to try that right now," she said.

No heat alarm — yet

For now, the situation seems to be under control. Officials at Cook County Health and Loretto Hospital said they aren't seeing many heat-related emergency room visits, and as of Friday afternoon, Cook County had not recorded any deaths associated with high temperatures.

Simone Mitchell-Peterson of the social service agency Little Brothers-Friends of the Elderly said her group is conducting hundreds of well-being visits, and has been able to provide enough fans and air conditioners to keep people at home.

"We're doing everything we can to make sure their needs are met so they can stay cool and comfortable where they reside," she said.

For those who do need to seek relief, city officials have pledged to keep cooling centers safe with social distancing and mask policies.

Demand so far appears to be manageable: A Tribune reporter found no one at a cooling center in Bronzeville Thursday afternoon despite scalding temperatures, while just a handful of people were seated in an icy meeting room in an East Garfield Park community service center.

They watched the news on a wall-mounted TV or dozed in chairs set roughly 6 feet apart. A 33-year-old woman who declined to give her name had a suitcase full of her belongings by her side; she said she has been transient for several months, living in shelters and hotels due to family problems.

She said she has been nervous about contracting COVID-19 as she moves between shelters and temporary living spaces. But now there is another foe to dodge.

"It's scorching," she said through her mask.

The National Weather Service says that after a few days of mild relief, 90-degree days will return midweek. Meanwhile, state officials on Friday announced 1,317 new COVID-19 infections, the highest total Illinois has seen in a month.

Chicago Tribune

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Strategies to help kids get used to wearing face masks

July 9, 2020

Children and masks — there are strategies to help kids grow into the new habit, and it starts with the adults.

Classrooms may not look quite the same in the fall. Add masks to your student's school supply list.

"Just to start talking about it, 'This is what's going to happen. This is the way you are going to be able to go back to school.' And most of the kids are really, really wanting that, socializing with other friends and all that, so we have to explain how that is going to happen, and I think this is the right time to start," Dr. Rosibell Arcia, Cook County Health pediatrician, said.

Arcia said build on the conversation over the summer to help kids understand expectations at school, but keep the explanation short and simple.

"You want to make it more direct, 'We do have to wear the mask.' And then also make the point 'we.' It's not like you are making the child do it. We are all doing it," Arcia said.

When it comes to proper wear, there are some dos and don'ts for all ages. Wearing a mask below the nose won't prevent the spread of droplets, and it won't protect you from others who may be sick.

"You want to make sure you are covering both your nose and then underneath and your mouth completely," Arcia said.

And, finally, the Cook County Health pediatrician says, make masks fun. Engage children in the process. Make a face covering as a craft project or let kids decorate their own designs.

"You can look for masks that include characters they like, maybe characters from books, they can use that type of fabric. You can make it personalized, maybe put their initials on it," Arcia said.

Masks are not recommended for children younger than two years of age and can even be dangerous on infants.



ABC 7 CHICAGO

[Coronavirus Chicago: Man becomes 2nd COVID-19 survivor to receive rare double-lung transplant](#)

July 9, 2020

Northwestern Medicine surgeons performed a second double-lung transplant on a COVID-19 patient last weekend.

The patient, an Illinois man in his 60s, spent 100 days on life support before receiving the transplant over the Fourth of July weekend at Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

Northwestern surgeons performed what is believed to have been the first-known lung transplant on a COVID-19 patient in the U.S. last month -- on a woman in her 20s.

"Our first patient continues to recover at optimal pace," said Dr. Rade Tomic, a pulmonologist and medical director of the Lung Transplant Program. "Our second patient is already off the ventilator and is talking to his family. We're optimistic that both patients will make a full recovery and return to their daily lives."

The most recent transplant recipient contracted COVID-19 in late March.

For more than three months, the man was on life support before he was cleared of having the coronavirus and was able to receive the double lung transplant.

He is expected to eventually, but his doctors are emphasizing that even in recovered COVID-19 patients, long-term consequences are still unknown.

"I've never seen any case like this," said Northwestern Medicine Thoracic Surgeon, Dr. Samuel Kim.

Kim joined ABC7 Chicago via Skype to give more details about the latest transplant, only the second of its kind in the U.S.

He said the patients lungs were severely damaged by the virus, almost like concrete.

"Nothing compares to what we see now with these two cases with Covid," Dr. Kim said. "The amount of lung destruction is by far nothing I've really seen in my lifetime."

Typically, a double-lung transplant takes six to seven hours, but this surgery took about 10 hours due to lung damage and severe inflammation in the chest cavities from COVID-19.

"His lung damage was among the worst I've ever seen," said Dr. Samuel Kim, a Northwestern Medicine thoracic surgeon who assisted in the double-lung transplant.

After a lung transplant, more than 85-90% of patients survive one year, and report complete independence in day-to-day life, Northwestern doctors say.

While doctors say the country's fatality rates may have level off for the time being, they warn that COVID-19 infections still come with unknown long-term consequences.

"COVID-19 puts individuals who become ill at risk of serious lung problems," said Cook County Health Senior Medical Officer and Co-Lead, Dr. Kiran Joshi He added that so far in a small number of patients, those problems can become chronic.

"Staying home, wearing a mask, maintaining your distance, are things that we can do to do that to protect one another," he said.



[Fireworks Injuries Are Up This Summer As More Chicagoans Stage 'Backyard' Displays, Burn Doctor Says](#)

July 7, 2020

CHICAGO — The Fourth of July weekend was a busy one at Cook County Hospital, where trauma and burn unit doctors rushed to treat fireworks-related injuries.

While the burn unit has seen more firework and sparkler-related injuries since May than in past years, the number of patients treated over the holiday weekend could have been much worse considering [fireworks complaints quadrupled and border-state fireworks shops have reported record sales.](#)

"We did see some horrific injuries, there's no question, but most were treated as outpatient type injuries. We had a couple of bad ones that we had to admit but nothing that we couldn't handle," said Dr. Stathis Poulakidas, a trauma and burn surgeon and director of the Cook County Trauma & Burn Unit.

Some of the most serious injuries were caused by mortars that weren't watched carefully, exploding in someone's face or chest, harming their lungs, Poulakidas said.

"There were some bad facial fractures and lacerations. There's skin burns all over. People didn't ignite on fire like you would think but there was a peppering [of burns], almost like a shotgun blast with the mortars," he said.

Victims treated this weekend ranged in age from 15 to 50 with most being between 30 and 40 years old, Poulakidas said.

It's normal for the burn unit to see an uptick in fireworks injuries around the Fourth of July. But they treated fireworks injuries much earlier this year than in years past.

"We usually get a big uptick around the week of the 4th, maybe starting a few days before and extending a few days after," Poulakidas said. "But we've been peppered continually since mid-May with smaller fireworks injuries...kids with burns on their hands from sparklers, and also injuries from the mortars, the M80s, the Roman candles — those started much earlier and for a longer period of time than we normally see for fireworks injuries."

Total numbers of injuries and of fires resulting from fireworks have not been tabulated from this year yet, but based on increase of 911 calls and increased sales of fireworks at fireworks stores just over the state borders, the Illinois State Fire Marshal, which issues an annual report towards the end of July, fears there may be an increase in both.

"That's what we're waiting to see," JC Felt, spokesman for the Illinois State Fire Marshal, said Monday.

Last year 126 people were injured and one killed from fireworks between June 23 and July 20. Half of all injured suffered multiple injuries and children under the age of 11 accounted for 22 percent of those injuries, according to the Fire Marshal's report.

Firework activity has increased across the country this year. The cancellation of municipal fireworks shows as well as boredom over the last few months as people have been cooped up because of coronavirus may have led to the increase of "backyard fireworks," said Julie Heckman, executive director of the American Pyrotechnics Association.

With the rise in do-it-yourself fireworks shows that began around May, 911 calls in Chicago so far this year have seen a large increase.

Between January 1 through July 5, Chicagoans made 19,925 calls to 911, up from 4,612 during the same period last year, according to OEMC spokesperson Mary May.

And sales of fireworks at shops across the Wisconsin and Indiana borders have been up significantly since May, with one store in Indiana tripling its sales over last year and another store having to operate 24-hours to keep up with demand.

Despite the amount of calls, Chicago Police made no fireworks-related arrests over the holiday weekend, according to police spokesperson Michelle Tannehill.

Before the July 4th weekend, fire officials urged Chicagoans to be safe with fireworks — even sparklers, which many consider safe enough for children to handle.

At a press conference at the Chicago Fire Academy on July 1, Fire Commissioner Richard Ford II said “sparklers are easily available, and while they may not go boom ... they will burn up to 1,800 degrees.”

Poulakidas agreed with the Ford, saying sparklers may look harmless but can be extremely dangerous to children.

“What they do is they burn their hands and drop them and it either catches their clothing on fire if it hits their shirt or drop it onto their shoes and burns through and it burns their feet pretty significantly, in addition to the hand burns,” Poulakidas said. “They are very simple to look at, they look very innocuous, but carry an extreme hazard because you put them in a young person’s hands and they become a lethal weapon.”

Asked if treating fireworks victims distracts him or hospital staff from treating people with other types of injuries, Poulakidas said the hospital is able to handle whatever comes its way.

“It makes for a busy night but I think we are well equipped to handle the volume, from our nursing staff to our ancillary staff to all our physicians. I think we were well equipped to handle that as well as our gunshot victims, car accident victims and all of that.”

While he feels it’s impossible for the police to enforce the state’s ban on fireworks, Poulakidas said it would help if advertising was scaled back.

“The folks that sell the fireworks just over our borders are advertising heavily along the highways and throughout the state. That might be one proactive maneuver to put some of those ideas out of people’s minds,” Poulakidas said.

Whether or not that ever happens is yet to be determined, but Poulakidas said he will continue to remind residents that fireworks are nothing to be cavalier about.

“We try to tell people to leave it to the professionals,” he said.



Cook County Announces \$41M Grant to Fund COVID-19 Contact Tracing

July 7, 2020

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and the Cook County Department of Public Health announced this month that CCDPH will be receiving almost \$41 million in grant funding from the Illinois Department of Public Health to rapidly scale-up its COVID-19 contact tracing program in suburban Cook County over the next three to six months.

The funding will allow CCDPH to focus on communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

"This is a win for Cook County," said President Preckwinkle. "What we have seen with this pandemic is another reminder that until we address the structural issues Black and brown communities face, they will continue to be disproportionately impacted. I am committed to addressing all of the drivers in our communities that contribute to such inequities, and this funding will certainly help."

Public health departments routinely reach out to the contacts of positive cases when investigating communicable disease outbreaks to let them know they have been exposed to a disease and to provide instructions and monitoring to keep it from spreading to others. This grant will allow CCDPH to scale its contact tracing program and staffing commensurate with the numbers of cases in suburban Cook County.

"Contact tracing is crucial to preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19," said Dr. Rachel Rubin, CCDPH Co-Lead and Senior Medical Officer. "We currently have about 25 contact tracers working on COVID-19. Expanding our workforce to 400 people will enable CCDPH to reach up to 90% of case contacts within 24 hours."

CCDPH intends to earmark as much as 20%, or \$8 million, of the grant funding for community-based organizations located within, or primarily serving residents of, communities of high economic hardship, discrimination and racism. The funding will be used to conduct effective public health education and outreach; provide enhanced COVID19 case management and referrals for resources; and address other social and economic impacts, such as housing instability and lack of food. For more information, visit: <https://www.cookcountypublichealth.org/communicable-diseases/covid-19/contact-tracing/>.

FOREST PARK REVIEW

[County ramps up virus contact-tracing efforts](#)

July 7, 2020

Cook County Department of Public Health officials announced last month that they received nearly \$41 million in COVID-19 relief funding from the Illinois Department of Public Health through federal funds to "build-up capacity and infrastructure of local health departments to rapidly scale-up and sustain major COVID-19 contact tracing programs," according to a statement the department released in June.

During a press conference held June 11, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle joined health department officials to announce the initiative, which they said could allow the county to trace 3,000 contacts a day, according to an ABC 7 report.

"For Cook County to reopen, it is critical that we quickly ramp up our contact-tracing capabilities. The program will help us continue to mitigate the pandemic by identifying new cases quickly and helping residents who have been exposed to someone carrying the disease," Preckwinkle said.

In the health department's release, officials explained there are "about 25 contact tracers for the 2.5 million people who live in suburban Cook County," adding that the department's purview doesn't include Chicago, Evanston, Skokie, Oak Park and Stickney.

Health department officials explained that contact tracing is a process requiring multiple steps that include "identifying, assessing and managing persons exposed to a positive COVID-19 case and connecting exposed persons to resources to assist them during quarantine."

First District Cook County Commissioner Brandon Johnson's office explained in an email sent to constituents in June that the health department anticipates starting its first group of contact tracings by early August, that tracers "will be brought on in groups of 50-100," and that the department will "have a full team by the fall."

Anyone interested in contact-tracing jobs can fill out a form online, which is available at the health department's website: cookcountypublichealth.org. Residents should understand that completing the form does not promise a job or job interview.

"Contact tracers will be trained in the basics of the virus, epidemiology, case investigation, and contact tracing," according to the form.



ABC 7 CHICAGO

[Despite discomfort in heat, health officials say keep your mask on when out in public](#)

July 6, 2020

Summertime has turned up the heat in Chicago, and the next several days are forecasted to be sweltering.

Factor in face masks, and it could feel downright stifling.

Health experts advise that despite any discomfort, resist the urge to remove your masks when out in public.

"It's really important that people remain vigilant and realize that we are still in the middle of a pandemic. The coronavirus is in our community and we have to be extra careful," said Dr. Steven Aks, an ER physician at Cook County Health.

He said there are still many unknowns about coronavirus, especially how long it may linger in the air, and said masks remain an important means of protection.

"It's a time to be civic minded and think about others and that's gonna help us get out of this faster," he said.

Still, many people say it comes down to personal preference.

"It's for my safety and it's for other people's safety, so whatever I need to do to stay safe especially with the coronavirus going on, I don't mind," said Necia Stallworth.

"Now we're getting a little more crowded, so we'll probably put them on. But if it's fresh air and you're not close, I'd rather have the fresh air," one woman said.

Children who started summer camp today in The Chicago Park District were required to wear masks.

Administrators said great care is taken to make sure the kids stay hydrated, and are not outside too long.

"At 90 degree temperature it does get a little bit more difficult to breathe with a mask so we try to limit it and change up the events for the day," said Alonzo Williams with the Chicago Park District.

Experts say if you are planning on being outside for a long period of time, use a more breathable cotton mask in a lighter color, and bring extras in case of sweat.



Dangerous smog over Chicago creates looming health threats

July 6, 2020

Monday looked like a perfect summer day for being outside but health experts say you'll be breathing some potentially dangerous air.

David Soler of Schiller Park says he knew when he got up this morning it was going to be a rough one: "Days like this you feel the air a lot thicker."

Having suffered from asthma since he was a kid, David keeps an inhaler in his pocket at all times.

"On a day like this it would be almost a death trap to have the air-conditioning off. I was able to feel that instantaneously when I woke up," he said.

But it's not just people with asthma and other respiratory issues who are being warned.

"Today it's a red air quality day, which means it's unhealthy for children, adults over 65 and can affect anyone who is out, active, outside for a prolonged period of time," said Jill Thompson from the American Lung Association.

Jill Thompson of the American Lung Association says that blue haze hanging over Chicago is caused by pollutants trapped under a dome of hot air that could last for days.

"Ozone pollution they say is like a sunburn on your lungs. So it can actually burn and irritate your lungs, make it difficult to breathe, makes you cough," Thompson said.

The Illinois EPA has also issued air quality warning, saying the weekend's fireworks only made matters worse, throwing smoke and ash into the mix.

Doctors say the masks we are wearing to prevent COVID-19 serve a double purpose right now by also filtering out the pollution

"We tell them to really just listen to their body. To understand when they've reached their limit. To slow things down a bit," said Dr. Michael Hoffman from Cook County Health.

It's unlikely the smog will lift until the weekend.



[Doctor explains rise in anxiety since stay-at-home orders began](#)

July 7, 2020

Dr. Joyce Miller, Chair of Psychiatry for Cook County Health, talks about the rise in the number of people suffering from anxiety since the pandemic and stay-at-home orders began, and how to address it.



[Health Pulse: COVID-19's threat to the safety net](#)

July 3, 2020

Cook County Health is \$30 million behind budget and grappling with increased costs like employee overtime and shrinking revenues due to fewer nonemergency surgeries and routine appointments.

WHY THE PANDEMIC THREATENS HEALTH CARE IN COOK COUNTY: Cook County's public health system provides far more free care to low-income patients than any other hospital in the area. It now faces a financial reckoning as COVID-19 drives up costs and drains revenue.

If costs and patient volumes don't improve, and federal funds stop flowing, the system could end up with a \$187 million deficit next fiscal year. [READ MORE](#).

A CLOSER LOOK AT OUTBREAKS IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES: Outbreaks at correctional facilities could potentially threaten nearby communities, according to a report from the University of Illinois System's Institute of Government and Public Affairs (IGPA). IGPA's Policy Spotlight Pandemic Behind Bars: Containing COVID-19 Outbreaks in Illinois Correctional Settings examines cases in prisons and jails that have become COVID-19 hotspots.

As of June 22, the Cook County Jail Reported 558 detainees had tested positive for COVID-19, seven of whom had died, the statement said, and among jail staff, 446 cases had been confirmed, and two correctional officers and one deputy had died due to COVID-19.



Sharp Increase In Opioid Overdose Deaths Is A Symptom Of The COVID-19 Pandemic, Doctors Say

July 3, 2020

For health experts a worst fear has come true — alarming numbers out of Cook County show a sharp spike in overdose deaths from opioids. Those on the front lines of the crisis call it yet another indirect symptom of coronavirus and the effects of quarantine.

For those who handle the deceased within Cook County, the past few months have felt like a battle from all fronts.

"We're seeing an increase in number of deaths due to COVID," said Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Ponni Arunkumar. "We're also seeing an increase in the number of gun homicides recently, and now within all of this we're seeing an increase in case load because of opioid deaths."

The Cook County Medical Examiner's Office has been in close contact with public health departments over what seems to be a brewing crisis within another crisis.

"The news has been pretty grim. It's been striking how big a spike it is," said Dr. Steven Aks, director of toxicology at Cook County Health.

When comparing this time last year to 2020 so far there is over a 50% increase in opioid overdose fatality numbers, just based on the cases that are confirmed. Opioid overdose deaths since the stay-at-home order this year are expected to jump. Over 570 cases are still pending. They estimate 70% to 80% of those will be classified as opioid overdoses, for a total of over 1,000.

"During a pandemic, with stay-at-home orders and social distancing, these are triggers for someone with substance abuse disorder," said Aks.

Dr. Kim Dennis, CEO and medical director of SunCloud Health, sees and hears the cries for help firsthand.

"Phones have been ringing off the hook with people looking for treatment options," Dennis said.

She works for SunCloud Health, which oversees treatment for addictions and disorders.

"I hear all the time, 'I really miss seeing people. I miss seeing my family. I lost my job. I can't see my therapist. I feel incredibly lonely. Nothing's going to get better,'" she said.

Telehealth and therapy is out there, but not all insurance covers that, and for Black Chicago neighborhoods with poor access to care and addition services, there is a disproportionate effect. In 2016 the majority of Cook County's fatal opioid overdoses were in White, non-Hispanic residents.

"If you throw a major public health disaster — which the pandemic is — on top of that, you're going to get a mess like we're in right now," Aks said.



[City of Chicago Details Safety Plan Ahead of Holiday Weekend Heat Wave](#)

July 3, 2020

With a streak of hot weather expected throughout the holiday weekend, the city of Chicago on Friday has unveiled plans to keep residents comfortable and cool while celebrating Independence Day.

Officials said the city's "extreme heat plan" will be activated when the National Weather Service forecasts a heat index in excess of 105 to 110 degrees for at least two consecutive days.

That plan will include cooling centers, cooling buses, well-being checks and more, officials said. There will also be wellness checks for some of the area's most vulnerable populations, including homeless residents, seniors and people with disabilities.

However, residents aren't able to cool off at city beaches due to closures imposed by the coronavirus pandemic. On Friday, NBC 5 saw many people cooling off at parks throughout the city, practicing social distancing.

In Humboldt Park, some people found a way to cool off on the water: riding in swan boats.

In some areas NBC 5 went to Friday night, many people were donning masks. But that wasn't the case everywhere.

Some say wearing a mask is unbearable in the hot weather.

Dr. Rachel Rubin with the Cook County Department of Public Health advises people not to ditch their mask - no matter how warm it is.

"Put a cool towel or damp towel around your neck, wear a hat, keep out of the sun," she said. "Walk in the shade and keep water with you. All you need is to be safe."

On a hot holiday weekend, when even our four-legged friends are sweating, Chicago's Office of Emergency Management and Communications said it will coordinate responses to escalate services if necessary.

The New York Times

[Stop Unnecessary Arrests to Slow Coronavirus Spread](#)

July 2, 2020

Jails around the country have become a major breeding ground for the coronavirus. And as authorities arrest, book and release thousands of people charged with low-level offenses each day, they are unwittingly unleashing the virus on the outside world.

My colleague Daniel Chen and I found this dynamic at work as people were processed in and out of the Cook County Jail in Chicago, as we reported recently in a study in the journal Health Affairs. The consequences were startling. The cycle of arrests, jailings and releases was the most significant predictor of the spread of the coronavirus in Chicago and the rest of Illinois. Roughly one in six of all cases in the city and state were linked to people who were jailed and released from this single jail, according to data through April 19.

It's not hard to understand why. People are arrested for low-level crimes, processed through crowded jail spaces where the risk of infection is high and then sent back to their communities, where they inadvertently spread the virus. We found that this churn of arrest, jailing and release was more consequential than race, poverty, population density and public transit as a harbinger of Covid-19 cases.

On average, for each person cycled through Cook County Jail, our research shows that an additional 2.149 cases of Covid-19 appeared in their ZIP code within three to four weeks after the inmate's discharge. At least 60 percent of these cases were in Black-majority ZIP codes.

The scale of this virus multiplier effect is enormous. Cook County Jail cycles about 100,000 people through its doors every year, approximately 75 percent of them Black. Nationally, some five million people are cycled through jails annually. Before the coronavirus hit, 94 percent of those booked into Cook County Jail were charged with nonviolent offenses.

This jail was the site of one of the largest coronavirus outbreaks in the country. In two months, more than 700 inmates tested positive and seven died. Two corrections officers also died, and hundreds more were infected. Jail officials have taken effective steps to control the epidemic inside the jail. But because of the large number of daily arrests and incarcerations, preventing the spread of the virus outside the jail — because of undetected infections acquired during processing — is extremely difficult.

There is no public safety reason to incarcerate a vast majority of these people, in Cook County or elsewhere. Nonviolent offenses account for 95 percent of the more than 10 million arrests in America every year. Most of these can be effectively and safely managed with citations, summons, community service requirements, food support, mental health referrals, housing and other alternatives to incarceration.

Based on our study in Chicago, it seems clear that standard policing and incarceration policies are driving preventable spread of the virus. These policies are now harming not just inmates and overly policed communities of color but also the rest of America. Infectious disease does not respect segregation or geographic barriers, and the disproportionate sickness and death from the virus that has afflicted minority neighborhoods is now widening. Many emergency medical workers, police officers, health care workers and jail guards have most likely become sick and died because of transmission linked to our national obsession with incarceration as a solution to social problems and crime.

Society's excessive reliance on arrests and incarcerations is putting jail administrators in impossible positions. Because of the incubation period of the virus and asymptomatic transmissions, efforts in jails to reduce spread, including increased testing at the time of booking, reducing jail populations and better sanitation, are not sufficient to stop the virus. If only one person in these crowded spaces is infected, by the end of processing, more are likely to be.

And with each passing day, more people are being released from jails with the belief that they are negative for the coronavirus when in reality, the virus may have already begun to spread in their bodies. They may soon become infectious to others, particularly family members and close contacts.

To prevent thousands of unnecessary deaths and to reopen the economy, policymakers must act urgently to stop this daily cycling of thousands of people in and out of jails. During a pandemic, issues of criminal justice reform are not partisan matters. To help curb the virus, we must immediately stop arresting and jailing people for nonviolent offenses.

If we fail to do this, the criminal justice system will continue to exacerbate the spread of the coronavirus, leaving death in its wake.

How COVID-19 threatens health care in Cook County

July 2, 2020 – Crain's Chicago Business

Cook County's public health system faces a financial reckoning as COVID-19 drives up costs and drains revenue.

Two-hospital Cook County Health was under pressure before the pandemic to cut spending and address a rising burden of uncompensated care without a permanent leader. Now \$30 million behind budget, the system is grappling with increased costs like employee overtime and shrinking revenues due to fewer nonemergency surgeries and routine appointments.

A plan is underway to bring down the projected \$61 million deficit for fiscal year 2020, with officials late last month eliminating 70 positions through a mix of layoffs and cutting vacant jobs. If costs and patient volumes don't improve, and federal funds stop flowing, the system could end up with a \$187 million deficit next fiscal year.

"We are basically projecting what we believe to be the worst-case scenario," interim CEO Debra Carey says. "We are definitely seeing the loss of certain revenues coming in, and the county has its own challenges because of COVID, so it's not able to step in."

At stake is the future of the county's health care safety net, which provides far more free care to low-income patients than any other hospital in the area. Further cuts could mean dropping planned capital projects, consolidating service lines or closing some community health centers. In addition to the impact on patient care, any erosion of services would drive Cook County Health patients to private hospitals that—to varying degrees—also are dealing with the financial fallout from the coronavirus.

As one of the largest public health networks in the nation—with a \$2.8 billion annual budget—the system covers Stroger Hospital on the Near West Side, Provident Hospital on the South Side, a network of clinics, an insurance company and medical services for detainees at the Cook County Department of Corrections, as well as the county's Department of Public Health.

"The ability of a public health system to adjust to a reduced revenue stream quickly is very difficult," says Duane Fitch, a Plante Moran partner who specializes in health care. "Health care systems have a lot of fixed costs."

Coronavirus precautions forced Cook County Health to reduce a range of nonemergency services in March, and revenue-generating activities continue to be 40 percent lower than normal, officials said last month. At the same time, the system expects to spend up to \$32 million on employee overtime, personal protective equipment and other costs related to treating COVID-19 patients.

While some public systems rely more heavily on sales taxes and other local government funding, Cook County Health primarily runs on payments for providing medical care. Since 2013, its tax allocation from the county has decreased by more than \$130 million. The county is providing \$83 million in fiscal 2020 for public health and correctional health operations, but doesn't give the health system money for traditional medical services.

SHORTFALL

Thanks to a total of \$122 million in federal CARES Act provider relief funding, the health system hasn't yet needed to seek more funds from the county, Carey says. County government has its own challenges. Its general fund faces a projected shortfall of \$219.7 million in fiscal 2020, with sales taxes and other revenues down, officials said last month. It plans to address the gap "through a combination of expenditure control measures, federal reimbursements and our own reserves," Cook County Chief Financial Officer Ammar Rizki says in an email, noting that officials don't anticipate looking to taxpayers to fill gaps in the general fund or the health fund.

But all bets are off when it comes to a gap of up to \$409 million, including the projected health fund shortfall, for fiscal 2021. "Everything is on the table," Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said last month.

"Everything falls on the taxpayers eventually," says Laurence Msall, president of the Civic Federation of Chicago, a fiscal watchdog. "What is not known is the level of assistance from the federal government. Will it be sufficient to spare traumatic increases in Illinois and Cook County taxpayers' obligations?"

Even before COVID-19 started spreading in the U.S., the health system was under intense financial pressure from the rising cost of uncompensated care, which includes unpaid bills and free care. From fiscal 2015 to 2019, Cook County Health saw annual charity care alone increase 23 percent to \$327 million.

In 2018, Stroger Hospital spent \$324.6 million, or 54 percent of its revenue, on charity care. By contrast, Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Streeterville spent \$23.2 million, or 1 percent of its revenue.

Based on lower patient volumes, Cook County Health predicts charity care could drop to roughly \$269 million for fiscal 2020. The dip also might be the result of other hospitals stepping up to care for uninsured COVID patients, given the potential for reimbursement from the federal government during the pandemic.

CEO SEARCH

Meanwhile, in the midst of the gravest public health crisis in generations, Cook County Health is searching for a permanent CEO. Carey, who previously served as deputy CEO of operations, took the helm on an interim basis in January after John Jay Shannon's contract was not renewed by the health system's independent board. Carey says the search for a permanent leader is underway, but she declines to comment further.

The system also could get a boost from its Medicaid managed care plan, which expects enrollment to increase as more people lose their jobs and qualify for government-funded health insurance. CountyCare, which operates only in Cook County, has 326,000 members and accounts for 15 percent of the Medicaid managed care market in Illinois. Like other insurers, CountyCare has had to pay fewer claims amid COVID-19 as hospitals tabled nonemergency procedures and many outpatient visits. But the health plan isn't gearing up for a windfall.

"We know that, eventually, individuals will still need to get care," Carey says. "It's truly just a delay. It's not a savings in any way."

However, with fewer new claims coming in, the pandemic gives CountyCare an opportunity to catch up on its backlog, which prompted an inquiry from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services earlier this year. As of June 7, the health plan had about \$175 million in unpaid claims, down from about \$350 million on Feb. 9. Carey says CountyCare submitted a corrective action plan to CMS in April and has taken the appropriate steps to address the agency's concerns.

In the meantime, revenues are slowly recovering as nonemergency procedures resume. But many unknowns remain, including whether a second wave of COVID-19 could hit, forcing hospitals to buy up even more personal protective equipment and suspend nonemergency care once again. In addition to the steps Cook County Health is taking to address the potential deficit, Carey says other hospitals in the area also will play a critical role in the system's future.

"It's so important that we have others help in terms of charity care and the uninsured," Carey says. "If we start cutting back services because we just do not have the resources," she warns, "it will impact every other health system in this county."



[Doctor weighs on in Fourth of July fireworks safety](#)

July 2, 2020

Dr. Stathis Poulakidas, director of the Cook Co. Health Burn Unit, weighed in on fireworks safety going into the holiday weekend.



Summer Violence Could Overwhelm Coronavirus Precautions At Cook County Jail

June 30, 2020

Inside America's jails and prisons there's a delicate balance at play, weighing the usual demands of a typically crowded inmate population against the potent reality of an ongoing coronavirus pandemic. These precautions have mostly come in the form of single celling detainees, quarantining individuals who are either sick or symptomatic, reducing the overall population by releasing nonviolent low-level offenders and more.

In places like Chicago's Cook County Jail, summertime spikes in detainees are typical, usually coinciding with violence in the warmer months, meaning that the "delicate balance" they've put in place to protect against coronavirus quickly gets thrown off.

"I'm probably 500 people away from where this can't work," said Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart. "There are all these interlinking parts here where there's not unlimited beds, there's not unlimited space, there's not unlimited correctional staff to watch them." On a month-to-month basis, the jail is already beginning to see an uptick in the average number of detainees they're getting, according to data provided by the jail.

It means the jail may have to lose one of their main precautions of single celling and go back to putting two in a cell, following general [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance](#) that those who have recovered from coronavirus are not as likely to be infectious.

That would mean pulling from a pool of detainees siloed in the jail's quarantine bootcamp, created specifically for the pandemic to separate out those who are sick.

"With us being detainees they're doing the best that they can with soaps, hand sanitizers, making sure we keep everything clean," said Michael Allen, a detainee being housed in a specific part of the "camp" for those who have recovered from coronavirus. "I would just like to say I hope it comes to an end real soon."

'We were in a war'

The number of confirmed cases at the jail went from 38 detainees in late March to over 250 just a week and a half later. In total, since their first confirmed cases in mid-March, [more than 500 detainees ended up testing positive](#), seven of them died. More than 400 employees tested positive cumulatively as well, and three of them died.

"When I look back, it feels like the fog of war. We were in a war," said Dr. Connie Mennella, Chairperson of the Department of Correctional Health with Cermak Health Services in Cook County. "There wasn't specific guidance on what to do in jails," she continued, "We knew it wasn't if coronavirus was coming to the jail, if it's in the city of Chicago, it's coming to the jail."

Since then, the numbers have gone from what once was a more than 90% positivity rate down to less than one, according to data provided by Cook County Health. Now the jail is arming itself with one of the biggest weapons any jail in the United States now has at its disposal, testing.

"A lot of them say 'I don't have it, I'm not sick.' You may not be sick but you may have Covid-19," said Victoria Furlow, an intake screener at the jail.

"You don't have to be symptomatic, you don't have to be a risk factor, we're going to test you for Covid," said Dr. Mennella.

Between May 8 and June 20, more than 85% of all their newly confirmed cases were identified during the intake process.

But it's not just what's happening on the inside, a lot of the population control comes from choosing whether to send someone to jail in the first place. By mid-April, Cook County jail had released about a fourth of its entire population and even months later it remains among its lowest headcount in history.

"We have a jail that can only maintain a limited population because of Covid-19 and we should be making sure that our attention is going after those that are causing harm to our community," said Kim Foxx, Cook County State's Attorney. "Our number one priority is making sure that jail does not become a hotspot once again."

'No one else was testing'

At one point in early April, the jail was labeled by one newspaper as "the largest known source for coronavirus infections" in the country, a title Dart contended was unfair for one simple reason, "No one else was testing."

"We're all sitting there saying to ourselves, what did we do wrong?" questioned Dart. "It comes back to the only thing we did wrong is that we were transparent."

Since then, there have been outbreaks that have far surpassed Cook County's cumulative total. Outside Columbus, Ohio, more than 1,300 inmates tested positive for coronavirus across three facilities in mid-April, with over 1,000 at the Marion Correctional Institution alone.

It's hardly an unfamiliar story either in places like jails where sheer numbers combined with a lack of space make social distancing much more difficult than it is in the outside world. In total, just under [50,000 inmates nationwide have tested positive](#) for coronavirus over the course of this pandemic, and at least 585 have died as a result of Covid-19, according to data compiled by The Marshall Project, a non-profit journalism organization collecting data on Covid-19 infections in state and federal prisons.

"In this crisis is an opportunity," said Lenore Anderson, President of the Alliance for Safety and Justice, an organization that works in finding alternatives to incarceration. "The opportunity is to flip script on public safety, to do a 180 here and to really focus on what does it look like when we spend our investments on public health."



[Doctor explains why wearing a mask is still important in the summer](#)

June 30, 2020

The summer heat can make wearing a mask uncomfortable, but Dr. Jenny Lu from Cook County Health explains why it's still important to do as the pandemic continues.



[Chicago Area Hospital Workers Concerned About COVID-19 Spikes](#)

June 30, 2020

There are COVID-19 concerns for Illinois hospitals.

The system was strained at the start of the pandemic. Now on the other side of the curve, health professionals are concerned it could be pushed to the limit once again.

CBS 2's Vince Gerasole has more on the reasons why.

Illinois' positivity rate is a relatively low 2.6%. But COVID-19 is still with us. Health professionals are concerned that in spite of the lessons they've learned in tackling the disease: if we let down our guard, they will be overwhelmed.

Though Illinois has done a good job of masking up, distancing and slowly opening up, the science shows there's still need to be vigilant.

"We were not overwhelmed in Illinois, but we got close," said Dr. Rachel Rubin of the Cook County Department Of Public Health.

From a recent low of 462 on June 22, the number of cases has modestly ebbed and flowed, with 724 new cases confirmed Tuesday. That pales in comparison to Florida which last reported 7,793 new cases in one day. She said if there was a spike here, there would be problems.

"Our medical systems and care systems can absolutely be overwhelmed. There is no doubt that that can happen," Rubin said. "It makes me scared. It makes me nervous."

Rubin starts with reasons not to be nervous. We know more about how the disease is spread, implemented isolation practices in hospitals and locally we test and contact trace.

But those measures depend on a public that doesn't let down its guard.

"It's got to be almost everybody doing this," Rubin said.

Though hospitals that once struggled have managed to find adequate protection for workers, concerns remain.

"The problem is not behind us, because there are fundamental issues in the supply chain across the world," said Sean O'Grady, Chief Clinical Operations Officer of North Shore Healthsystem.

It was one of several healthcare facilities that had to furlough staff.

"The good part about furloughs is we have the ability to call people back at a moment's notice," O'Grady said.

Northshore successfully funneled patients to a special stand alone COVID-19 facility, but there is a human factor to take in if numbers spike.

"I think we are tired. I think people are fatigued," O'Grady said. "It is grueling and certainly is a challenge for people who have put themselves on the front lines to be caregivers every day."

O'Grady said he's not overly concerned because his hospital now knows how to respond. But if the public doesn't do its job , others warn that could push the system to its limits.

Push the system is another way of saying cost lives.



[State Rep. Ford: Illinois ‘Dropped the Ball’ on Contact Tracing](#)

June 30, 2020

Contact tracing is supposed to be one of the primary ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker’s original Restore Illinois reopening plan called for “contact tracing and monitoring within 24 hours of diagnosis for more than 90% of cases” in each Illinois region [before entering phase four](#); the entire state moved on to the less restrictive fourth phase last Friday.

The state’s [Restore Illinois metrics](#) show no indication of whether the contact tracing target was met.

But [state Rep. La Shawn Ford](#), D-Chicago, said after “bragging” about Illinois’ robust contract tracing efforts, the Pritzker administration has “dropped the ball.”

“When the governor made this huge announcement about how there’s going to be investments, we’ve (the Black Caucus) been trying to work with the governor’s office, even to help them with the planning. And you know it’s been real crickets. We have not heard anything from the governor’s office about how they’re going to roll this plan out,” Ford said. “And unfortunately the Black community I think is going to suffer from this.”

Pritzker’s spokeswoman referred WTTW News to [the governor’s remarks about contact tracing last Thursday](#).

“We continue to build up our contact tracing capacities, including new hires that have increased the ranks of contact tracers by 20% since June 1 for a total of 550 active contact tracers across the state. Two hundred-fifty new tracers have been identified and will join their ranks over the few weeks as we continue to scale up our operation, including new technology to multiply their effectiveness,” Pritzker said. “All 97 of Illinois’ local health departments have applied for funding support totaling \$230 million to increase contact tracing. That money is on its way out the door with final disbursement coming in the next few weeks.”

Contact tracing as a strategy isn’t new to the coronavirus; it’s something local health departments have always done for communicable disease measles and sexually transmitted diseases, said co-leader and senior medical director of the Cook County Department of Public Health Dr. Rachel Rubin.

But the sheer number of COVID-19 cases and the virus’s rapid spread has made it a challenge, such that Rubin said Cook County had focused on the most high-risk, vulnerable populations.

Cook County is in the process of ramping up its efforts, and announced in mid-June its plans to spent \$40 million in federal and state funding to hire contact tracers within the coming months, with a focus on hiring people from Black and Brown communities most affected by COVID-19.

“So that we can begin to be able to touch base with every new case that comes across our desk, and contact that individual who is positive and find out who they have been in contact with, to keep the case in isolation and to keep the contacts in quarantine, so that we won’t have that next surge, or that next surge won’t be as steep or as high,” Rubin said.

Chicago on Tuesday announced that [the city chose the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership](#) to spend \$56 million in state and federal funds to hire 600 contract tracers, including through partnerships with community organizations also focused on disproportionately impacted communities.

In a call with reporters on Tuesday, Chicago’s public health director, Dr. Allison Arwady, said the city is currently assigning every case of a Chicago resident testing positive, such that every COVID-19 patient is called by someone from the city within 24 hours.

Those initial, sensitive conversations will continue to be made by public health employees.

But she said contract tracers will be able to do the work of reaching out to the networks that each COVID-19 patient may have interacted with.

Arwady said such calls can be difficult, but she encouraged patients to respond.

"If you do get a call, and a positive result ... stopping the threat of COVID in Chicago is depending on you being forthcoming," she said.

Health care officials stress that none of the information collected through contact tracing is shared, including with other government agencies.

Part of the delay in contact tracing comes from having to train people for the work.

The College of DuPage on Monday began a four-week contract tracing certification course, which covers everything from privacy to the basics of diseases like SARS and MERS, interviewing skills and data entry.

Contact tracing calls, she said, could take anywhere from 30 or 45 minutes, maybe longer.

Kathy Cabai, who developed the program, said local health departments have already reached out, seeking to potentially hire the course graduates.

Cabai said that after government cuts to public health programs, the pandemic has shown the need to invest in them – and in training for things like contact tracing.

"We as a country need to start looking at, what do we need to work on? We need to have resources," she said.



Doctors Warn of More Fireworks Injuries This Year

June 30, 2020

With the coronavirus pandemic cancelling many professional fireworks displays, doctors say people are crossing borders to buy fireworks in states where they're legal, but still very dangerous.

"Now you have amateurs, who never really use fireworks before, trying to set off M-80's or quarter sticks of dynamite or some of these mortars. They're coming in with horrific injuries," said Dr. Stathis Poulakidas, Division Chief of the Burn Unit at Cook County Health.

Poulakidas said his unit has been treating fireworks injuries earlier this year, than they have in years past.

"We've seen them as early as May, when some of the things opened up in the state of Illinois. With that, that's a far earlier time period, so we're kind of seeing them slowly trickle in and we're worried about a big spike right now during this next week's worth of festivities," Poulakidas said.

While "consumer fireworks" are illegal in Illinois, sparklers are considered a "novelty" and are legal. Organizers with the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance say they are still very dangerous, and set up a safety demonstration at St. Alexius Medical Center Tuesday.

Mike Figolah, a retired fire chief, touched a sparkler briefly to t-shirt that was on a child-size mannequin, and the shirt quickly caught fire.

"Sparklers burn at up to 1,800 degrees. So many people don't realize the dangers associated with it," Figolah said.

In all, 45 percent of all fireworks injuries happen to kids, according to the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance, so the agency's advice for parents is simple.

"I know this year this is a difficult year because a lot of shows have been cancelled, but they are out there. Don't do the backyard displays. Don't buy fireworks. When things go wrong with fireworks, they go terribly wrong," Figolah said.

There are professional fireworks displays in the Chicago area that have not been cancelled. You can see a list of those [displays on the NBC Chicago website](#).



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Emanuel Delivers Meals To Stroger Hospital

June 30, 2020

Former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel said he wants to help the city heal after a violent weekend.

He and a team of volunteers delivered 65 meals to Stroger Hospital.

The meals included dessert made by Maya-Camille Broussard and her bakery, Justice of the Pies. It's a locally Black-owned bakery committed to equality and fairness.



Emanuel Delivers Meals To Stroger Hospital

June 30, 2020

To thank front line healthcare workers, former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and a host of volunteers delivered meals to Stroger Hospital.



[Emanuel Delivers Meals To Stroger Hospital](#)

June 30, 2020

To thank front line healthcare workers, former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and a host of volunteers delivered meals to Stroger Hospital.



UNIVISION

Cómo hablar con nuestros pequeños sobre la importancia de usar mascarilla en tiempos de coronavirus

June 30, 2020

La doctora Rosibell Arcia, pediatra de Cook County Health, explica que es clave que esto sea algo normal para los niños, "que los padres estén usando las mascaras sin quejarse ni hacer nada negativo al respecto". Agrega que es importante que los papás porten este elemento al momento de pedirles a los menores que también lo hagan.



Summer violence could overwhelm coronavirus precautions in Chicago's biggest jail

June 29, 2020

Inside America's jails and prisons there's a delicate balance at play, weighing the usual demands of a typically crowded inmate population against the potent reality of an ongoing coronavirus pandemic. These precautions have mostly come in the form of single celling detainees, quarantining individuals who are either sick or symptomatic, reducing the overall population by releasing nonviolent low-level offenders and more.

In places like Chicago's Cook County Jail, summertime spikes in detainees are typical, usually coinciding with violence in the warmer months, meaning that the "delicate balance" they've put in place to protect against coronavirus quickly gets thrown off.

"I'm probably 500 people away from where this can't work," said Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart. "There are all these interlinking parts here where there's not unlimited beds, there's not unlimited space, there's not unlimited correctional staff to watch them." On a month-to-month basis, the jail is already beginning to see an uptick in the average number of detainees they're getting, according to data provided by the jail.

It means the jail may have to lose one of their main precautions of single celling and go back to putting two in a cell, following general [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance](#) that those who have recovered from coronavirus are not as likely to be infectious.

That would mean pulling from a pool of detainees siloed in the jail's quarantine bootcamp, created specifically for the pandemic to separate out those who are sick.

"With us being detainees they're doing the best that they can with soaps, hand sanitizers, making sure we keep everything clean," said Michael Allen, a detainee being housed in a specific part of the "camp" for those who have recovered from coronavirus. "I would just like to say I hope it comes to an end real soon."

'We were in a war'

The number of confirmed cases at the jail went from 38 detainees in late March to [over 250 just a week and a half later](#). In total, since their first confirmed cases in mid-March, [more than 500 detainees ended up testing positive](#), seven of them died. More than 400 employees tested positive cumulatively as well, and three of them died.

"When I look back, it feels like the fog of war. We were in a war," said Dr. Connie Mennella, Chairperson of the Department of Correctional Health with Cermak Health Services in Cook County. "There wasn't specific guidance on what to do in jails," she continued, "We knew it wasn't if coronavirus was coming to the jail, if it's in the city of Chicago, it's coming to the jail."

Since then, the numbers have gone from what once was a more than 90% positivity rate down to less than one, according to data provided by Cook County Health. Now the jail is arming itself with one of the biggest weapons any jail in the United States now has at its disposal, testing.

"A lot of them say 'I don't have it, I'm not sick.' You may not be sick but you may have Covid-19," said Victoria Furlow, an intake screener at the jail.

"You don't have to be symptomatic, you don't have to be a risk factor, we're going to test you for Covid," said Dr. Mennella.

Between May 8 and June 20, more than 85% of all their newly confirmed cases were identified during the intake process.

But it's not just what's happening on the inside, a lot of the population control comes from choosing whether to send someone to jail in the first place. By mid-April, Cook County jail had [released about a fourth of its entire population](#) and even months later it remains among its lowest headcount in history.

"We have a jail that can only maintain a limited population because of Covid-19 and we should be making sure that our attention is going after those that are causing harm to our community," said Kim Foxx, Cook County State's Attorney. "Our number one priority is making sure that jail does not become a hotspot once again."

'No one else was testing'

At one point in early April, the jail was labeled by one newspaper as "the largest known source for coronavirus infections" in the country, a title Dart contended was unfair for one simple reason, "No one else was testing."

"We're all sitting there saying to ourselves, what did we do wrong?" questioned Dart. "It comes back to the only thing we did wrong is that we were transparent."

Since then, there have been outbreaks that have far surpassed Cook County's cumulative total. Outside Columbus, Ohio, more than 1,300 inmates tested positive for coronavirus across three facilities in mid-April, with [over 1,000 at the Marion Correctional Institution](#) alone.

It's hardly an unfamiliar story either in places like jails where sheer numbers combined with a lack of space make social distancing much more difficult than it is in the outside world. In total, just under [50,000 inmates nationwide have tested positive](#) for coronavirus over the course of this pandemic, and at least 585 have died as a result of Covid-19, according to data compiled by The Marshall Project, a non-profit journalism organization collecting data on Covid-19 infections in state and federal prisons.

"In this crisis is an opportunity," said Lenore Anderson, President of the Alliance for Safety and Justice, an organization that works in finding alternatives to incarceration. "The opportunity is to flip script on public safety, to do a 180 here and to really focus on what does it look like when we spend our investments on public health."



[Crain's 2020 Notable Health Care Heroes](#)

June 29, 2020

Reshma Mohiuddin

Primary care physician, John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County

Dr. Reshma Mohiuddin supports inpatient COVID units as well as outpatient COVID testing. Taking care of a jailed COVID patient at Cermak Health Services, a veteran with PTSD, was a heartbreakingly experience for Mohiuddin. She learned that his estranged stepmom wanted to be there for him, but the rules did not allow it. Mohiuddin was able to arrange a FaceTime call, and he was able to say goodbye.

Daily Herald

[Harper College student group aims to help Dreamers](#)

June 27, 2020

A new student group at Harper College in Palatine aims to help immigrant students, faculty and workers, known as Dreamers, through advocacy, referrals for legal services and community education.

A U.S. Supreme Court decision Thursday upheld the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program shielding immigrants brought to the country as children without documentation from deportation and allowing them to legally work here. The program, created in 2012 by then-President Barack Obama, has been under threat of elimination by President Donald Trump since 2017.

The court's decision provides "a sense of stability for the time being," said Giancarlo Rivera-Moore, of Palatine, president of the Foundation for Allies of Undocumented Non-Citizen and DACA Students at Harper.

Rivera-Moore, 23, is a DACA recipient from Peru brought to the U.S. at age 5. He is studying biomedical engineering at Harper and works as a certified nursing assistant at a Lake Zurich nursing home. For three years, he lived with a crippling fear that at any moment his life could be taken away, he said.

"It's important that DACA (recipients) know that they are not alone," he said. "The goal of the organization is to create empowerment and a sense of leadership in these students."

LGBTQ health equity: Cook County Commissioner Kevin Morrison and Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle recently hosted a [Facebook panel discussion](#) on health equity addressing systemic barriers preventing LGBTQ people from accessing health care and how COVID-19 is affecting that community.

Speakers highlighted health disparities and specific challenges for people of color and those who identify as transgender and nonbinary.

"This is about a whole set of inequities based on crowded housing conditions, poor access to health services, working conditions that are unsafe like food processing and manufacturing (facilities)," said David Ernesto Munar, a Cook County Health Board member.

Resources allocated for pandemic response have helped clear some hurdles for Black and Latino communities to access telehealth services and medications, said Aisha Davis, director of policy for the AIDS Foundation of Chicago.

Job loss and homelessness is another growing concern for Cook County's LGBTQ community, said LaSia Wade, founder and executive director for Brave Space Alliance, an LGBTQ Center located on Chicago's South Side.



ABC 7 CHICAGO

[How parents can get their kids to wear face masks](#)

June 26, 2020

Now is the time to teach children to wear masks, especially since it's required as they head back to school.

Dr. Rosibell Arcia, a pediatrician at Cook County Health, says it's important to set expectations for kids right now.

The first lesson is how a child should put on a mask.

"You want them to hold it on the sides," Dr. Arcia demonstrated. "On the sides, place it on your face, you have to cover your nose, make sure we cover our nose and cover our mouth....and then you are going to pull and put it on top of your ears."

What you say depends on the child's age. For kids under 3, Dr. Arcia says, "We try to be clear and short explanation. We want to just say, when people are sick, sometimes we have to wear a mask so we don't make other people sick."

Doctor Arcia says you can share more information with older children, it just depends on their development. And since kids are always watching, she is reminding parents that they play a huge role.

"You have to make sure as a parent you are wearing the mask, not complaining about it, or saying things that may sound negative to the child," Dr. Arcia said.

Overall, she says parents should just try to have fun and be playful.

"They put a mask on a teddy bear or a stuffed animal, right? That will make it for the kids something fun, something okay to do," Dr. Arcia suggested.

Along with masks, hygiene, like washing hands, is also critical.

"Make it a routine at home, something expected from them," Dr. Arcia said. "The more they do it at home, the more they'll get used to doing it outside the house as well."



[As Chicago Restaurants Reopen, Workers Have COVID-19 Concerns](#)

June 25, 2020

As Illinois readies for Phase 4, more restaurants across the state are reopening.

Although many have shared excitement, not everyone thinks that it's a good idea.

CBS 2's Marissa Parra spoke with servers afraid for their health, and afraid of speaking out publicly.

Joshua Leisner said as much as we've all missed our restaurant, not everyone is excited about them reopening.

"I've got bartenders, chefs, cooks, managers. If one of us goes down, we all go down," Leisner said.

CBS 2 has seen dozens of messages and comments from Chicago-area servers wishing to remain anonymous. Comments like, "I wanna work, but I really don't want to get my 6-year-old with asthma sick." Another said "it feels like their back is against the wall."

"The same worries that we had back in March, April, May, they come right back. And now you may not have a job if you don't," Leisner said.

The fear a lot of servers have is that they don't get a choice to say no.

"If someone says I'm not sure, the company has the option of going to unemployment and saying 'hey we've offered them a job and they turned it down.' People have that fear," he added.

And now that restaurants are opening at lower capacity, that means less tables, which means fewer tips.

"We're obviously not going to gouge them to make more, but is there money to be made, can you make a living," Leisner asked.

The question for a lot of them is whether a financial hit is worth the health risk. One server commenting anonymously "so employees are required to wear a mask to keep customers safe but customers can take off their mask once they're face to face with us?"

Doctor Sharon Welbel, Director of Cook County Infection Control said this is a good reminder for patrons who might be forgetting their server is also susceptible.

"It's not like the virus has gone away," Welbel said. "And when the server comes to take their order, I would expect people to keep their masks on."

Chicago has already seen a restaurant reopen only to close again. In an Instagram post from Sunday, Logan Square's Longman and Eagle announced it was shutting its doors after an employee tested positive.

Something that Leisner and other restaurant workers are wary of spreading to their own. As for Longman and Eagle, it said "the staff is quarantining and being tested, and the space is undergoing a thorough sanitation."

Social Media Dashboard



Insights and Activity Report

June 25-July 25, 2020



COOK COUNTY
HEALTH

Social Media Summary

June 25-July 25, 2020 Activity

During June 25-July 25, 2020, the communications team posted content on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn for Cook County Health.

Posts included content such as COVID-19, universal masking, social distancing, masking and children, reduction of COVID-19 cases at the jail, new COVID-19 clinical trials at Cook County Health, Cook County Health physician named Crain's Health Care Hero, Census 2020, Cook County Health 2020 Doctor of the Year recipient, 2020 Virtual Pride at CORE and more.

Facebook – 39 posts

<https://www.facebook.com/Cookcountyhhs/>

Instagram – 19 posts (*does NOT include Story posts*)

<https://www.instagram.com/cookcountyhealth/>

Twitter – 40 posts (*includes retweets*)

<https://twitter.com/CookCtyHealth>

LinkedIn – 13 posts

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/cook-county-health/>



COOK COUNTY
HEALTH

Social Media Insights

As of July 25, 2020

Twitter (28 Day Summary)

- Impressions: **37.7K**
- Profile visits: **543**
- Mentions: **116**
- Followers: **2,974** (up **56**)

Facebook (28 Day Summary)

- Post reach: **85,635** (up **107%**)
- Post engagement: **4,972**
- Page views: **1,704**
- Additional page likes: **53**
- Additional page followers: **59**

LinkedIn (30 Day Summary)

- Impressions: **26.8K**
- Unique visitors: **481**
- Followers: **5,097** (up 186)

Instagram (7 Day Summary)

- Impressions: **4.2K**
- Reach: **693**
- Profile visits: **252**
- Followers: **1.8K** (up **21**)



Top Social Media Posts

June 25-July 25, 2020



COOK COUNTY
HEALTH

Top Social Media Posts: Twitter

Post Performance

- Impressions: **1,749**
- Total engagements: **58**
- Engagement rate: **3.3%**

Cook County Health
@CookCtyHealth

In 3 days we'll be sharing an important message about COVID-19 prevention from [@McKinleyKNelson](#), founder of [@ProjectSwishChi](#). Stay tuned! **#BTS #COVID-19 #OneCookCounty**



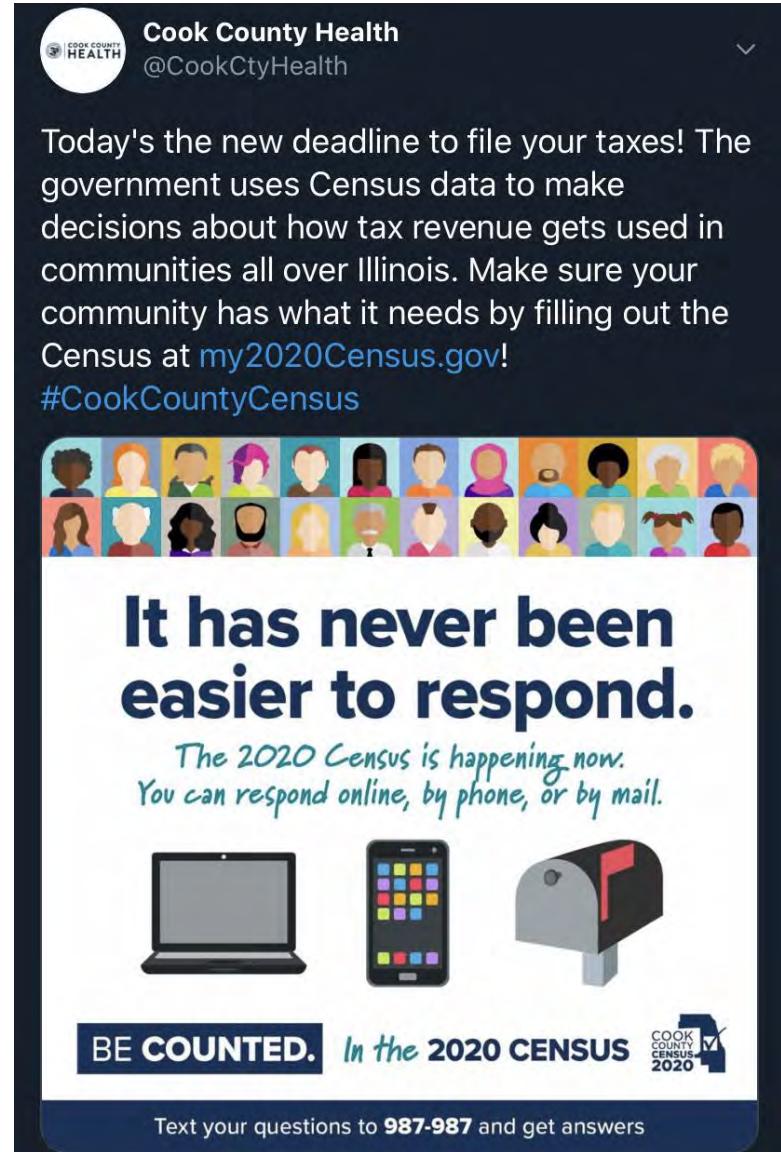
0:04

297 views

Top Social Media Posts: Twitter

Post Performance

- Impressions: **1,293**
- Total engagements: **12**
- Engagement rate: **.9%**



Top Social Media Posts: Facebook

Post Performance

- Reach: **3,045**
- Reactions, comments and shares: **101**
- Clicks: **200**

Cook County Health Published by CM Cchhs [?]- July 15 -

Today, Cook County Sheriff Thomas J. Dart and Cook County Health's Dr. Connie Mennella, chair of correctional health, discussed a new study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that found measures implemented to combat COVID-19 at the jail resulted in a dramatic reduction in new cases and contained the outbreak.

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/.../ct-coronavirus-cdc-cook-co...>



Performance for Your Post

3,045 People Reached

101 Reactions, Comments & Shares

Like	On Post	On Shares
77	31	46

Love	On Post	On Shares
6	4	2

200 Post Clicks

57 Photo Views **46** Link Clicks **97** Other Clicks

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0 Hide Post **0** Hide All Posts
0 Report as Spam **0** Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Top Social Media Posts: Facebook

Post Performance

- Reach: **1,098**
- Reactions, comments and shares: **203**
- Clicks: **88**

Post Details

Cook County Health Published by CM Cchhs [?]- June 30 - 

Congratulations to Dr. Reshma Mohiuddin, an internal medicine physician at Cook County Health, for being named a health care hero by Crain's Chicago Business. Dr. Mohiuddin has worked on both the inpatient COVID-19 units and the outpatient COVID-19 testing site throughout the pandemic. #OneCookCounty #TeamCCH #COVID19 #coronavirus

[https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/...](https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/)

Performance for Your Post

1,098 People Reached

203 Reactions, Comments & Shares

Reaction Type	On Post	On Shares
Like	128	50
Love	40	8
Wow	2	0
Comments	23	2
Shares	10	10

88 Post Clicks

Type	Value
Photo Views	49
Link Clicks	39
Other Clicks	0

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0 Hide Post 0 Hide All Posts
0 Report as Spam 0 Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Top Social Media Posts: LinkedIn

Post Performance

- Impressions: **3,886**
- Clicks: **178**
- Engagement rate: **6.9%**

Cook County Health

5,097 followers

1w

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<https://lnkd.in/eiaUCmp>



COOK COUNTY
HEALTH

Top Social Media Posts: LinkedIn

Cook County Health
• HEALTHER
5,097 followers
3w • ②

Congratulations to Dr. Aseel Hanna, internal medicine physician at Cook County Health, who was awarded 2020 Doctor of the Year. Nominated by colleagues and staff, Hanna demonstrates patient-centered care and puts her patients at Woodlawn Health Center first. She also is a mentor to other doctors, physician assistants, social workers, nurses and other staff. #doctoroftheyear #teamCCH

Post Performance

- Impressions: **2,718**
- Clicks: **96**
- Engagement rate: **6.11%**



Top Social Media Posts: Instagram

Post Performance

- Impressions: **987**
- Reach: **772**
- Profile visits from post: **4**



[View Insights](#)

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 Liked by **county_doc** and 106 others

cookcountyhealth Today Cook County/CORE HIV Integrated Program (CCHIP) held a social distancing event to celebrate Black Pride Matters. A lifetime of systemic discrimination and poorer health outcomes can make older LGBTQ people especially vulnerable. Now it is more important than ever to stand up as Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera and other activists bravely did to ignite the gay liberation movement. #blackpride #blacktranslivesmatter #pride #pridemonth

Top Social Media Posts: Instagram

Post Performance

- Impressions: **858**
- Reach: **756**
- Profile visits from post: **4**



[View Insights](#)

[Promote](#)



 Liked by **the_liz_e** and 60 others

cookcountyhealth Thank you, @rahmemanuel. Our staff appreciated the treats!
#Repost @rahmemanuel with @make_repost