



COOK COUNTY HEALTH

DEBRA D. CAREY
INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
August 28, 2020

In memorial

Recently, Cook County Health said goodbye to a valued team member. Mr. Ronald Russell was a longtime, dedicated employee with CCH’s Finance Department who also played a prominent role over the years in coordinating Stroger Hospital’s breast cancer survivor events. A devoted family man and active member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Mr. Russell never failed to make time for others, touching countless lives through his involvement in youth sports, housing programs, and child welfare causes. Please join me in honoring Mr. Russell’s memory.

Activities and Announcements

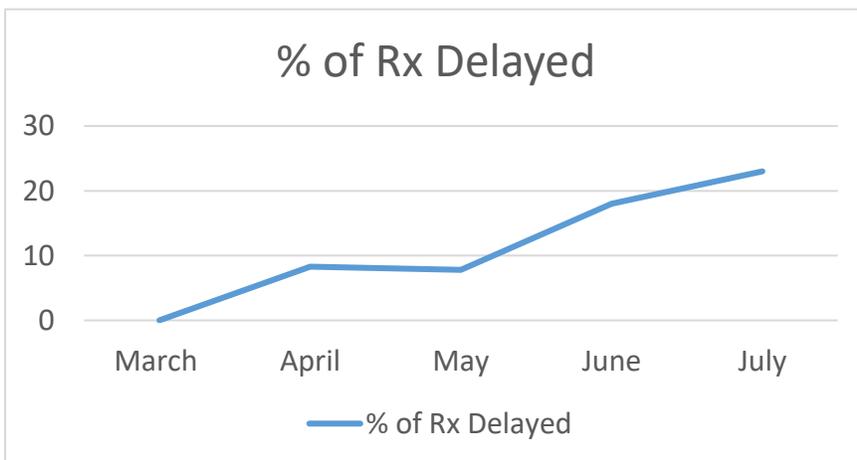
- CCH continues to test and care for **COVID-19** patients across the system. To date, CCH has conducted more than 33,000 tests and cared for more than 700 inpatients. A resurgence committee is meeting regularly to discuss lessons learned and plan accordingly should we experience a surge in cases.

Cermak remains vigilant in its efforts to contain the virus at the Cook County Jail. Efforts to date, which have included extensive testing, including asymptomatic and surveillance testing, have kept the positivity rate under 1.5% for the past several months.

The Cook County Department of Public Health continues to work with its constituencies and partners in suburban Cook County and build its contact tracing program. Hiring is underway. CCH and CCDPH have been assisting the state and local organizations in hosting and promoting community-based COVID testing days.

Cermak remains vigilant in its work to contain the virus at the Cook County Jail. Efforts to date, which have included extensive testing, including asymptomatic and surveillance testing, social distancing, education and cohort housing, have kept the positivity rate under 1.5% for the past several months.

- On August 24, 2020, Cook County Health hosted a press conference with Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, US Senator Dick Durbin, US Congressmen Bobby Rush and Sean Castens, and Cook County Commissioner Dennis Deer to discuss **the impact of cuts at the US Post Office on CCH patients**. CCH’s mail order pharmacy fills 20,000 prescriptions every month. In July, 23% percent of mail-order prescriptions were delayed compared to less than 1% in March 2020.



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Dr. Claudia Fegan, Chief Medical Officer, spoke about the importance of patients receiving their medications on time and introduced her longtime patient, Patricia Moore, who did not receive her prescriptions recently.

- The **Cook County Health Equity Initiative** is co-led by Dr. Lakshmi Warrior, Chair, Division of Neurology, and Dr. Yvonne Collins, Medical Director, CountyCare, in collaboration with the CCH Center for Health Equity and Innovation. An internal group of key stakeholders across CCH is being organized to develop a comprehensive strategy with specific metrics and timelines to address health equity for patients, employees and community. CCH has elected to participate in the national Pursuing Health Equity Learning Network with the Institute of Health Improvement (IHI). CCH received a scholarship from IHI, so there is no cost for participation. The committee is currently working on:
 - Gathering input and feedback from key internal stakeholders building on the 70 stakeholder focus groups conducted in February.
 - Gathering and reviewing current work that addresses health equity, developing a plan to share this work with others internally.
 - Developing a community co-design committee that can provide input on further development of the plan.
 - Working to conceptualize an online forum regarding health equity per the Board equity resolution.

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 August 11, CCH’s Fresh Truck partnership with the Greater Chicago Food Depository (GCFD) resulted in 273 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 35,083 individuals, representing 116,382 household members, totaling more than 720,000 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 September include the following ACHN Health Centers:

- September 3 – **Prieto Health Center** – 2424 S. Pulaski Road, Chicago, IL 60623
- September 8 – **Provident Hospital/Sengstacke Health Center** – 500 W. 51st Street, Chicago, IL 60615
- September 15 – **Woodlawn Health Center** – 6337 S. Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, IL 60634
- September 17 – **Arlington Heights** – 3520 N. Arlington Heights Road, Arlington Heights, IL 60004
- September 18 – **CORE Center** – 2020 W. Harrison Street, Chicago, IL 60612
- September 22 – **Logan Square Health Center** – 2840 W. Fullerton Avenue, Chicago, IL 60647
- September 24 – **Oak Forest Health Center** – 15900 S. Cicero Avenue, Oak Forest, IL 60452

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

- The deadline to complete the Census 2020 has been moved up one month to September 30. Cook County Health continues to collaborate with President Preckwinkle, the Cook County Board of Commissioners, and the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development, to ensure that the county’s vulnerable populations are counted as part of the 2020 Census. Every month we continue to promote Census count enrollment through different outreach efforts and social media. In addition, representatives from the Bureau of Economic Development continue to make presentations at advisory council meetings on the importance of being counted.

IMPACT 2023 Objective 5.2C

- Cook County Health 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 center’s 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. In the third quarter of CY2020, Cook County Health will convene the first meetings of the Near South and North Riverside Advisory Councils, which are currently in the recruitment stage.

Upcoming CAC meeting dates:

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

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

Joint South Suburban: Thursday at 1:00 PM: November 19

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

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

IMPACT 2023 Focus Area 5

- The Community Affairs webpage is now live, and it can be visited at <https://cookcountyhealth.org/community-relations/>. The page allows community partners to easily access, download and share materials that would typically be distributed at in-person events. This one-stop webpage provides visitors with resources, the ability to ask questions about programs, sign up for the community newsletter and ask for speaker participation at events.

Media and social media reports attached.

Legislative Update

County

- In July, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle named Robert Currie, Raul Garza and Joseph Harrington to the Cook County Health Board of Directors. The appointments were referred to the Cook County Legislation Committee for consideration. A hearing is expected in September. The terms of Mary Richardson Lowry, Layla Suleiman Gonzalez and Sidney Thomas have expired. We thank them for their dedicated service to Cook County Health.

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.
- At the Medicaid Advisory Committee (MAC) meeting on August 7, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services announced that applications for expanded Medicaid coverage for non-citizen adults 65 years and older would be accepted starting December 2020, with up to three months of backdated coverage available. Older adults will be required to meet current income standards (up to 100% Federal Poverty Level) and will have access to nearly the same benefits package, with the exception of nursing homes, which will not be covered as part of this expansion.

[HB357/PA 101-0636](#), also known as the FY2021 Budget Implementation Bill, authorized coverage. Illinois will be the first state in the nation to expand Medicaid coverage to this population.

- HFS also announced at the August 7 MAC meeting that they intend to issue a provider notice in the next few weeks with guidance on how COVID-19 testing for the uninsured could be reimbursed.

HFS recently issued an [August 19 provider notice](#) that clarified the coverage of Long Term Acute Care (LTAC) hospital coverage for certain non-citizens who qualify for Emergency Medicaid due to a COVID-19 diagnosis.

- Representative Chris Welch requested data from HFS on Business Enterprise Program (BEP) participation as part of Medicaid Managed Care Organization contracting requirements. CountyCare staff have responded to these requests and are reviewing opportunities for improvement. Representative Welch has also issued similar requests to Illinois colleges and universities, as well as financial institutions, in an effort to increase minority participation and economic justice for African Americans and other historically disenfranchised groups.

Federal

- In late July, Senate Republicans, in consultation with the Administration, proposed a package of coronavirus relief measures. The package, collectively referred to as the HEALS Act, was dismissed by Congressional Democrats as inadequate. In early August, negotiations between the sides broke down, and the Senate adjourned for the August recess. The White House responded with a series of Presidential memoranda and an Executive Order. While the House returned in late August for a brief weekend session to vote on a bill to address concerns about the United States Postal Service, both chambers are not expected to return until well after Labor Day.
- The Senate Republican HEALS package includes a number of provisions of interest to CCH.
 - Provider Relief Fund (PRF) –The bill would provide \$25 billion for the Provider Relief Fund.
 - Accelerated and Advance Payments – The bill would delay the repayment from 120 to 270 days. It also would extend repayment from 12 to 18 months.
 - Liability Protection – The bill would protect health care providers from liability for injuries related to treatment, diagnosis or care directly affected by COVID-19.
 - Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) – The bill would authorize an additional \$2 billion for the SNS and require improvements in each state’s emergency stockpile.
 - Testing, Contact Tracing and Vaccine Development:
 - Aims to improve access to tests and would require HHS to identify specific test supply needs; identify projected demand and availability of needed supplies; and support activities to increase the availability of such supplies or appropriate alternatives.
 - Allocates \$16 billion for testing, contact tracing and surveillance in states.
 - Gives \$20 billion to the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) for vaccine, therapeutic and diagnostic development; and \$6 billion to develop and execute a new COVID-19 vaccination distribution campaign coordinated by the CDC.
 - Provides \$3.4 billion to the CDC, including \$1.5 billion to support state, local and territorial public health needs; \$500 million to enhance influenza vaccination efforts; and \$200 million each for global public health security and public health data reporting modernization.

The package did not include any significant Medicaid provisions important to CCH, including an increase to the Federal Medical Assistance Percentages (FMAP) for state Medicaid programs, a moratorium on the Medicaid Fiscal Accountability Rule (MFAR), or a repeal or further delay of the statutory cuts to Medicaid disproportionate share hospital (DSH) payments. FMAP, MFAR and DSH provisions were included in the House version of the bill, the HEROS Act, which was approved earlier this summer.

- Congress will have until the end of FY 2020 on September 30 to pass a continuing resolution (CR) to fund the federal government for FY 2021, beginning October 1, since none of the 12 FY 2021 Appropriations bills have been enacted. The CR may provide a vehicle for a coronavirus relief package, but the sides remain far apart. While members of both parties in competitive reelection contests have called for compromise, it is unclear whether that will happen before September 30. While there may be room for agreement on a package of health care and public health provisions, larger obstacles remain over the bill’s overall price tag and whether to provide additional fiscal relief to state and local governments.
- To date, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) have not sent the Medicaid Fiscal Accountability Regulation regulation to the White House Office of Management and Budget for final review, so its goal of finalizing the rule in September seems likely to slip. Coalition efforts to secure a congressional moratorium on finalizing MFAR continue.

- HHS Allocation of CARES Act Provider Relief Funds – In August, distributions from the PRF slowed significantly.
 - On August 7, HHS announced \$2.5 billion to be allocated to nursing homes to support increased testing, staffing, and PPE needs. They announced that this would be followed by additional performance-based distributions throughout the fall.
 - On August 14, HHS began distributing \$1.4 billion to 80 free-standing children's hospitals.

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

- On August 19, the U.S. Supreme Court announced that it will hear the case to overturn the Affordable Care Act, Texas v. United States, on November 10, a week after the presidential election. The President continues to repeat claims that he will release a plan to replace the ACA “soon”, but has yet to do so.

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

Community Outreach

In-Person Outreach Events Participation in August

- August 24-25 Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the **Harvey MARC (Multi-Agency Resource Center)** which was enacted to help residents who suffered undue damage by the storm of August 10. The event took place at the Thornton Township High School, located at 15001 Broadway Avenue in Harvey.
- August 29 Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at **Commissioner Dennis Deer’s Come Out and Take the 2020 Census** event, which will take place at 63rd Street and Halsted in Chicago.

In-Person Outreach Events Participation in September

- September 12 Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion through the Office of Cook County Commissioner Scott Britton at the **Explore Palatine Expo**, which is taking place throughout the Village of Palatine and aims to provide resources to the residents of the Village. Commissioner Britton’s Office has been provided materials on Cook County Health, the Arlington Heights Health Center and CountyCare, which they will share with residents and constituents.
- September 12 Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the **Meridian Health & Boys and Girls Club One Present: Keep It Up! Drive up Giveaway & Prize Distribution**, which will take place at the New Vision Community Church, located at 2552 W. 21st St. in Chicago.



SYSTEM NEWS

August 2020

Letter from the CEO

Dear Cook County Health Friends and Partners,

As we approach the last few weeks of summer, it is important that we continue to follow local, state and federal guidelines to slow the spread of COVID-19. We are seeing a major shift in the COVID-19 pandemic as more young people come down with the virus.

Now is not the time to back down in the fight against COVID-19. We all have to do our part by wearing masks, social distancing and limiting contact with other people.

It's also important that residents in our communities stay on top of their overall health. We are pleased to see more patients calling and coming in for routine care and our care teams are ready to provide you the services you need.



Continuing to see your doctor is important. Over the last few months, we have seen how certain health issues, including diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure, can increase the risk of COVID-19 complications.

This is especially true for minority communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on health inequities in our country. Earlier this summer, several Cook County Health colleagues participated in White Coats for Black Lives, a peaceful demonstration for our clinicians to show support for the Black Lives Matter movement and to draw attention to the issue of systemic racism in health care.

Cook County Health is proud of the work we have done for nearly two centuries to ensure that all individuals have access to high-quality health care, and I am grateful for the work our teams have done during the pandemic to reach out to at-risk populations to make sure they have the support and resources needed.

However, it's not just COVID-19 that is a concern, particularly for African Americans. Black residents in Cook County also have been more severely impacted by the opioid crisis, the surge in

gun violence and the increased rate in suicides this year.

Cook County Health continues to work to address these issues. In recent years, we have held a series of health and innovation summits with community leaders and organizations to discuss solutions for gun violence, the opioid epidemic, housing and food insecurity and issues surrounding the justice-involved population.

The pandemic has not alleviated these problems.

Gun violence continues to plague our communities. As of early June, Cook County Health had seen a 20 percent increase in the number of gun violence patients compared to the same time period last year. Even during Illinois' stay-at-home order, Cook County Health was caring for more gun violence patients year over year.

Like gun violence, the opioid crisis seems to have worsened during the pandemic. On July 14, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle joined health officials at a press conference to sound the alarm about rising opioid deaths during the first half of the year.

In 2019, there were 1,267 opioid-related deaths in Cook County, with a total of 605 midway through the year. As of July 14 of this year, there have been 770 opioid-related deaths. African Americans and Latinos make up nearly two-thirds of overdose deaths confirmed so far this year.

Cook County Health is proud of our efforts to combat the opioid crisis with work in the communities, our health centers and the Cook County Jail. It is important that we continue to push evidence-based treatment and recovery options to help those with substance use disorders.

There have been more suicides so far this year in the Black community than in all of 2019. With a confirmed total of 58 suicides by African Americans as of August 4, 2020, Cook County is on pace for this to be the worst year for suicides in the Black community in a decade.

There is no simple solution. The problem is multi-factorial and must be addressed. Cook County Health has taken a system-wide approach to integrating behavioral health into its primary care model. We believe that conditions like depression and anxiety are often linked to chronic illness and many can be addressed in a primary care setting.

Stressors such as housing and food insecurity can contribute to depression and anxiety. Cook County Health is working to mitigate these factors through a variety of programs, including health food initiatives and housing partnerships.

Finally, as part of the FEMA Disaster Relief Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Cook County Department of Public Health is expanding the contract tracing program for COVID-19, hiring and training individuals to help us slow the spread. More information about the program and job opportunities is provided in this month's newsletter.

Again, as we head into the end of these warm summer months, it is critical that we look out for one another. By taking into account the health of those around us, we can work together to further slow the spread of COVID-19 and to address other health issues that are impacting the most vulnerable of our Cook County residents.

Sincerely,



Debra D. Carey
Interim CEO

Cook County Health to Evaluate a Potential Antibody Treatment for COVID-19

Cook County Health is one of only 24 health systems in the U.S. to participate in a BLAZE-1 study to test the safety and efficacy of an antibody treatment drug that may help patients with mild to moderate COVID-19.

Study participants in this randomized, placebo-controlled trial will be given a one-time intravenous infusion of LY-CoV555, the antibody drug.

Antibodies have been proven effective in fighting viruses, bacteria and other foreign substances. Specifically, antibody medications that have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration have been successful in treating cancers, autoimmune disorders and other infectious diseases.

“It is important to evaluate therapies that use technology to mirror our own immune system's ability to disarm potential damaging effects of viral infections to prevent serious complications we've seen during this COVID-19 pandemic,” said Dr. Gregory Huhn, an infectious disease physician for Cook County Health and principal site investigator of the BLAZE-1 study. “Our hope is that the antibody drug will reduce COVID symptoms quickly after diagnosis and help to eradicate the virus more quickly.”

To be eligible to participate, patients must be 18 years or older, have tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 infection within three days prior to the study drug infusion, and be experiencing one or more mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms.

For more information on the study, please visit [JoinCOVIDStudy.com](https://www.joinCOVIDStudy.com). To sign up for the trial at Cook County Health, call 312-864-4606.

Cook County COVID-19 Rental Assistance Program

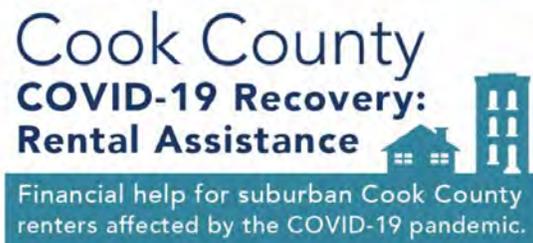
The deadline to apply for the Cook County COVID-19 Rental Assistance Program has been extended until August 24.

The Cook County COVID-19 Rental Assistance Program helps suburban Cook County residents having difficulty paying their rent as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It pays up to three months of overdue or future rent. Rental payments will be sent directly to landlords by the Housing Authority of Cook County.

The program is part of the Cook County Community Recovery Initiative, funded by the federal CARES Act.

For more information or to apply, visit the [Rental Assistance Program website](#). Applications will be accepted through the [online portal](#) until August 24, 2020.

Other rental assistance programs:
[Illinois Housing Development Authority](#)
[Emergency Rental Assistance](#)
[Chicago Department of Housing](#)



Cook County
COVID-19 Recovery:
Rental Assistance

Financial help for suburban Cook County renters affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The graphic features a blue background with white text and icons of a house and a building.

If you...

- ▶ live in suburban Cook County and rent your home
 - ▶ have past-due status on rental payments starting March 27.
 - ▶ and have not received other rental assistance
- ...then you may be eligible to receive up to \$4500 in rental assistance.**

Visit www.cookcountyil.gov/recovery to learn more.

Cook County Health Budget Hearings

Cook County Health will present its budget at the system board meeting on Friday, August 28. Public hearings on the budget will be held virtually and the dates will be announced next week.

New Community Relations Webpage

Cook County Health's Community Relations team prides itself on being community advocates and ensuring that Cook County residents have access to the latest information and resources they need.

Whether it is participating in community events, health fairs or, now, in "virtual" meetings, our culturally diverse and multilingual team will make sure your questions about Cook County Health are answered.

To learn more about the work being done or to find out how patients and community partners can best utilize our available resources, visit the new [webpage](#), located on www.cookcountyhealth.org, which includes a variety of handouts that can help individuals navigate the health system. We hope that you find the information useful and are able to utilize our resources properly to better help the health of all in Cook County.

Cook County Officials Raise Concern on Increased Opioid Deaths



Dr. Juleigh Nowinski-Konchak, ambulatory physician lead for Cook County Health's medications assisted treatment program, speaks about options available for those dealing with opioid dependency.



Dr. Steve Aks, division chair of Cook County Health emergency medicine & toxicology, joined Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle to raise the alarm on an increase in opioid deaths in Cook County this year.

On July 14, Dr. Steve Aks, division chair of Cook County Health emergency medicine & toxicology, and Dr. Juleigh Nowinski-Konchak, ambulatory physician lead for Cook County Health's medications assisted treatment program, joined Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and Cook County Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Ponni Arunkumar to discuss the opioid epidemic.

While Cook County Health has not seen an increase in emergency department visits for opioid-related issues, the number of opioid-related deaths being investigated by the Cook County Medical Examiner's office has doubled in the first sixth months of this year compared to the same time period last year.

In 2019, there were 1,267 opioid-related deaths in Cook County, including 605 midway through the year. As of July 14 of this year, there have been 770 deaths. African Americans and Latinos

make up nearly two-thirds of overdose deaths confirmed so far this year.

Dr. Aks attributed the spike in opioid-related deaths to substance use disorders that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cook County Health officials discussed their work on evidenced-based overdose treatment options including the drug naloxone.

Live Healthy Chicago to Provide Grants to Organizations Fighting COVID-19

Live Healthy Chicago (LHC) has been awarded \$5 million by the Oprah Winfrey Charitable Foundation to support organizations that are working to reduce health inequities in minority communities.

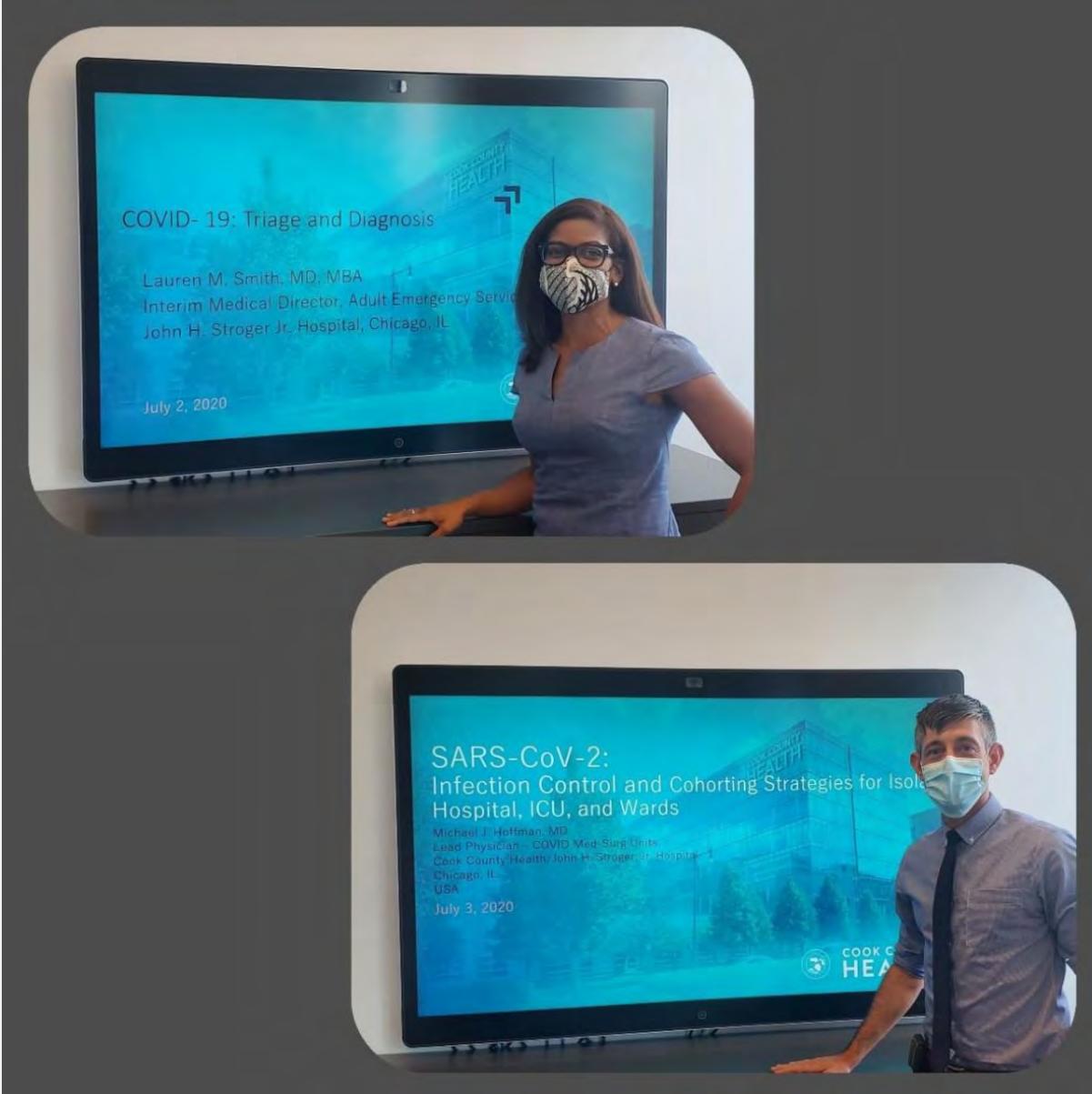
LHC is a collaborative formed by Forty Acres Fresh Market; MAAFA Redemption Project; My Block, My Hood, My City (M3); Rush University Medical Center; and West Side United.

LHC will be awarding \$2.9 million COVID-19 Response and Recovery Grants to community organizations that are based in areas most impacted by COVID-19. Organizations can request between \$10,000 and \$100,000 for projects. Grant funds must be used to address the impacts of COVID-19, and project grant funds need to be spent within one year (365 days) of the disbursement date.

For more information, visit LHC's website [here](#).

Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. on August 31. Grants will be announced by October 1.

Cook County Health Physicians Share COVID-19 Knowledge with Pacific Island Clinicians



Dr. Michael Hoffman, physician lead for the COVID-19 units at Stroger Hospital, and Dr. Lauren Smith, chair of observation and quality at CCH, recently made a virtual presentation as part of a webinar series with the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization’s Pacific Island Group to provide education on COVID-19 management.

The Pacific Islands have had limited interaction and experience with COVID-19 patients. The Cook County Health team provided insights into care management for these patients.

Cook County Department of Public Health to Increase COVID-19 Contact Tracing

The Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) is hiring contact tracers to assist in mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

In June, CCDPH announced that it received almost \$41 million in COVID-19 relief funding from the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) via the FEMA Disaster Relief Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

The overarching goal of IDPH’s COVID-19 Local Health Department Contact Tracing Grant program is to build up capacity and infrastructure of local health departments to rapidly scale up

and sustain major COVID-19 contact tracing programs.

Contact tracing is a multi-step process of identifying, assessing and managing persons exposed to a positive COVID-19 case and connecting them to resources to assist them during quarantine.

With the grant funding, CCDPH is expanding its contact tracing workforce to 400 people. The expanded contact tracing program will reach 90% of contacts of persons who test COVID-19 positive within 24 hours.

If you are interested in contact tracing jobs, visit [here](#).

Dr. Aseel Hanna Named Cook County Health 2020 Doctor of the Year



Dr. Aseel Hanna (second from right) was recognized as Cook County Health's 2020 Doctor of the year alongside (left to right) Debra Carey, interim CEO, Dr. Zaia Iachin, Dr. Hanna's husband, and Dr. Claudia Fegan, chief medical officer.

Congratulations to Dr. Aseel Hanna, internal medicine physician, for being named Cook County Health's 2020 Doctor of the Year. She was recognized at a recent Cook County Health board meeting.

Dr. Hanna is a community health center physician at our Woodlawn Health Center. More than 15 years ago, she began her career as an internal medicine physician at Oak Forest Health Center and then transferred to Woodlawn in 2008. She is an excellent educator for medical and physician assistant students, part of a multidisciplinary team of providers, and our resident resource for patients requiring complex case management at Woodlawn.

Dr. Hanna, who was nominated for this award by staff and colleagues, is known for her commitment to her patients and her mentorship to staff.

Particularly now, Cook County Health is grateful to the work of our physicians and the quality care they provide to our patients every day.

CORE Center Holds Events to Celebrate Pride



A lifetime of systemic discrimination and poorer health outcomes can make older LGBTQ African Americans especially vulnerable. During June, the Ruth M. Rothstein CORE Center celebrated Pride Month. On June 26, The Cook County/CORE HIV Integrated Program (CCHIP) held a socially distant event (pictured above) to celebrate Black Pride Matters.

Cook County Health Virtually Celebrates the 91st Bud Billiken Parade

For more than two decades, the Medical Staff of Provident Hospital of Cook County Health has managed the health station along the route of the Bud Billiken Parade. Due to the pandemic, the parade was canceled and the committee hosted a special on ABC-7 News instead. This year, the Bud Billiken Parade celebrated 91 years and the television special highlighted the history and positive impact the event has on the community.

As children return to school virtually, it is still important for kids to receive an annual health screening or wellness visit and receive updated vaccinations. To make an appointment with a Cook County Health pediatrician or family medicine specialist at any of the Cook County Health Clinics, call 312-864-0200. Cook County Health and the staff at Provident Hospital look forward to participating again in the 2021 parade celebration.

Cook County Health in the News



ABC 7 Chicago: **How parents can get their kids to wear face masks**



CBS 2: **As Chicago Restaurants Reopen, Workers Have COVID-19 Concerns**



WBBM Newsradio: **Gunfire Begets Trauma, Mixed Emotions, Social Worker Says**

WGN 9: **Dr. Kathryn Radigan on steroids and COVID-**



19 treatment

Crain's Chicago Business: How COVID-19 threatens health care in Cook County

How six months of COVID have changed Illinois forever

Block Club Chicago: Fireworks Injuries Are Up This Summer As More Chicagoans Stage 'Backyard' Displays, Burn Doctor Says

As Temps Rise, Two Public Health Crisis Could Emerge: 'It's a Deadly Combination'

Associated Press: Officials: Cook County opioid-related deaths on increase

WTTW: CDC Study Finds Measures Taken by Cook County Sheriff Mitigated COVID-19 Spread in Jail

Physician Profile: Drs. Kiran Joshi and Rachel Rubin, Co-leads, Cook County Department of Public Health



Dr. Kiran Joshi serves as co-lead for the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH). Dr. Joshi is the senior medical officer at CCDPH and an attending physician in the department of family medicine at Cook County Health. Since joining CCDPH, Dr. Joshi has led the development and implementation of WePlan 2020, a community health assessment and improvement plan for suburban Cook County. Dr. Joshi is committed to advancing health equity and making community health a priority. He co-developed the response to the opioid overdose epidemic for

CCDPH. His most recent research focuses on the clinical and virologic characteristics and transmission of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Dr. Joshi is an assistant professor of clinical family medicine at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

Dr. Rachel Rubin serves as co-lead of the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH). For more than 33 years, Dr. Rubin has held various leadership positions within Cook County Health. Currently, she is a senior medical officer at CCDPH and a primary care internist in the Cook County Ambulatory and Community Health Network and at the Ruth M. Rothstein CORE Center. In these roles, Dr. Rubin also served as a leader supervising, training and mentoring residents working on their Masters of Public Health. She is committed to reducing health inequities and supporting strong community collaborations to improve the health of all residents of the county. Her most recent research focuses on the clinical and virologic characteristics and transmission of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Dr. Rubin is also an adjunct faculty member at the University of Illinois, School of Public Health.

Complete Your Census Today



BE COUNTED.



Census takers have begun knocking on doors to gather responses from those who have not completed the 2020 Census. You can also fill out your form online, by phone or mail in your response. It only takes a few minutes. Visit 2020census.gov for more information.

Ensuring that every citizen is counted by the census is critically important to the well-being and future of Cook County, particularly in areas on the city's west and south sides that are often underreported.

The data gathered by the census is used to distribute billions in federal funds to assist local communities for important things like transportation, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition

Assistance Program (SNAP) and COVID-19 emergency response.

We hope that you will take the time before September 30, 2020, to complete the census survey for your household.

Please also encourage your family, friends and neighbors to complete theirs.

Visit our website at [cookcountyhealth.org](https://www.cookcountyhealth.org)

If you would like to invite a representative from CCH to attend a community event, please send an email to events@cookcountyhhs.org.

To provide feedback on CCH Community News, update your contact information, or unsubscribe, please email Marcelino Garcia, Director of Community Affairs, at mgarcia6@cookcountyhhs.org.

Cook County Health Media Compilation

July 26 – August 24, 2020

The
Washington
Post

Modern
Healthcare



Chicago Tribune



Media Dashboard: July 26-August 24, 2020

Total Number of Media Hits: 81

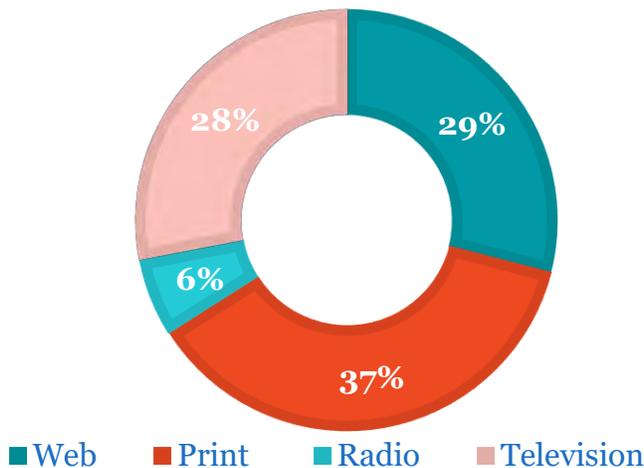
Top 5 Local Media Outlets

1. ABC-7
2. Chicago Tribune and Crain's
3. NBC-5
4. Chicago Sun-Times
5. FOX-32 and WBBM-AM

Top 5 National Media Outlets

1. Associated Press
2. Yahoo! News
3. MSN
4. U.S. News & World Report
5. Modern Healthcare

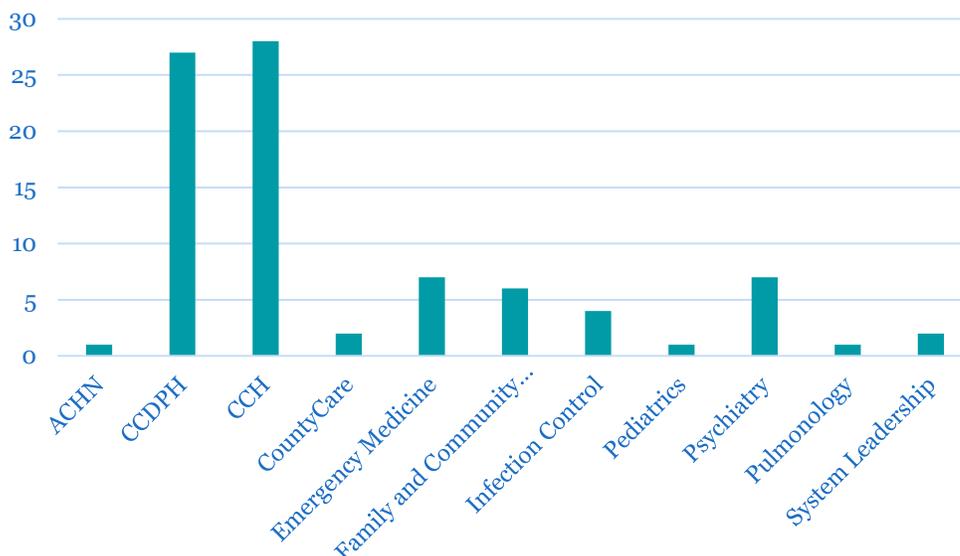
Media Outlet Type



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. College and COVID-19

Media Mentions by Department



More than 5,000 mail-order prescriptions delayed at Cook County Health amid postal service changes

August 24, 2020

More than 5,000 prescriptions normally filled by Cook County Health's mail-order pharmacy were delayed in July, following upheaval at the U.S. Postal Service.

The pharmacy normally fills more than 20,000 prescriptions each month, said Cook County Health Chief Medical Officer Dr. Claudia Fegan. In July, 23% of those prescriptions were delayed, she said. That was up from less than 1% delayed in March. Delays were up in April and May as well, and reached 18% in June.

In some ZIP codes, about half of the system's mail-order prescriptions in July were delayed, Fegan said. Some of the ZIP codes most affected by the delays are those that include the South Side neighborhoods of Auburn Gresham, Roseland, Pullman and South Shore.

"This is yet another example of the impact that policy changes have on our vulnerable populations," Fegan said at a news conference Monday. "Our patients deserve high-quality care and continuity of care. They deserve to be able to receive their medication and not have to worry about how they'll get to the pharmacy during a pandemic to get their medications."

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy implemented a series of policy changes that slowed down and delayed the mail, including canceling overtime and limiting mail transportation runs, according to the American Postal Workers Union. Those changes were met with criticism from Democrats who saw them as an attempt to make it more difficult for people to vote by mail in the November election.

DeJoy said in a statement last week that he would hold off on certain changes until after the November election "to avoid even the appearance of any impact on election mail." The U.S. House of Representatives approved a measure to send \$25 billion in additional funds to the Postal Service but that measure is not expected to be taken up in the Senate.

Cook County Health leaders said Monday they continue to hear complaints about delayed medications from patients.

"This has severely impacted seniors and other individuals who have high risk of exposure to COVID-19 and depend on the U.S. Postal Service to deliver their mail-order prescriptions on time," said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle.

Patricia Moore, a patient at Cook County Health who spoke at the news conference, said she had never had a problem getting her mail-order prescriptions delivered on time before now. But she recently ran low on her medication for high blood pressure when it didn't arrive on time. She ended up making a trip to Provident Hospital to pick it up. When she again ran low, she stood in line at her local post office for an hour-and-a-half to try to pick it up, only to be told that she'd have to come back another time.

When she finally received her medication, she was down to her last pill, she said.

"Finally, I got my medication, but I hope and pray in the future, I don't have to go through all these changes again," Moore said.

Representatives of other area health systems, including Sinai Health System, University of Chicago Medicine and Amita Health said they had not recently seen delays in mail-order prescriptions sent to patients. Some health systems' pharmacies use the Postal Service, while others use FedEx or UPS.

Advocate Aurora Health said in a statement that it's working ahead of expected demand whenever possible to minimize the effects of any mail delays on patients.

Cook County Health has been using services other than the post office to resend medications when they're urgently needed, officials said.



US PostMaster DeJoy testifies before House Oversight committee as USPS struggles to deliver medication in Chicago

August 24, 2020

CHICAGO (WLS) -- A Roseland couple has struggled to get medication by mail recently.

Patricia Moore reached out to the head of Cook County Health when her blood pressure medications didn't arrive by mail.

"I never had a problem getting my medication. And I talked to my postal worker the next day. And she said, 'well, they have medication there, but there was nobody to pass it out,'" Moore said.

On Monday, Cook County doctors and local officials spoke out about the need for dependable US mail Service after Cook County reported a quarter of the medication they sent by mail were delayed in July.

"We are worried our patients being able to get their medications on time without disruptions," said Dr. Claudia Fegan.

"As the USPS delays mount more and more patients at Cook County Health are seeing longer wait times to receive critical medications," said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle.

Sen. Dick Durbin said the issue was, "literally a matter of life and death."

US PostMaster Louis DeJoy testified Monday in DC before the US House Oversight committee hearing about efforts to improve medication deliveries.

"We're concerned about the impact that each individual across the country, and we're working extremely hard to bring the service levels back to where they were and exceed that and we will be there shortly," DeJoy said.

Some congressmen questioned why the hearing was held after a weekend vote.

The House passed a bill over the weekend to give \$25 billion dollars to the Postal Service, but the bill does not appear to have enough support in the Senate, or the White House.

USPS not bouncing back fast enough to deliver medications

August 24, 2020

"As the USPS delays mount more and more patients at Cook County Health are seeing longer wait times to receive critical medications."



Mail Delays Prescriptions Sent To Cook County Health Patients

August 24, 2020

CHICAGO — Thousands of Cook County Health patients didn't get their mail-order prescriptions delivered on time last month due to Postal Service delays, officials said Monday.

In July, more than 20 percent of the 20,000 prescriptions delivered by mail each month were delayed. That's a jump from the fewer than 1 percent of prescriptions that were reported delayed in March, officials said.

For days and weeks in July, Chicago mailboxes went empty after Postmaster General Louis DeJoy eliminated overtime, ordered letter carriers to start later in the day and other cost-saving edicts that caused deliver delays.

About half of patients from five Chicago ZIP Codes in mostly minority neighborhoods on the South Side including Roseland, South Shore and Auburn Gresham were delayed, according to Chief Medical Officer Dr. Claudia Fegan. In Pullman's 60628 ZIP code, 51 percent of the hospital system's mail-order prescriptions were delayed.

"This is yet another example of the impact that policy changes have on our vulnerable populations," she said at a Monday news conference. "Our patients deserve high-quality care and continuity of care. They deserve to be able to receive their medication and not have to worry about how they'll get to the pharmacy during a pandemic to get their medications."

Last week, DeJoy rescinded the policy changes blamed mail delivery problems in Chicago and across America, at least temporarily. The U.S. House also forwarded a bill that would boost Postal Service funding by \$25 billion that's awaiting consideration in the U.S. Senate.



Senior Nearly Ran Out Of Mail-Order Meds: 'I Want To Live As Long As I Can'

August 24, 2020

CHICAGO (WBBM NEWSRADIO) -- The House has voted to restore funding for the US Postal Service, but the bill faces an uphill fight in the Senate.

Monday afternoon, elected officials in the Chicago area got together to try to influence the outcome.

Democratic Congressman Bobby Rush referred to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell as "Mitch the Merciless."

Rush and other Democrats brought South Side resident Patricia Moore. She said her mail-order blood pressure prescription was so delayed she had only one pill left.

"Finally I got my medication. But I hope and pray in the future that I don't have to go through all those changes again. Because it's not good.

"I am a senior citizen. I do want to live as long as I can."

Congressmen at the news conference said they have gotten thousands of calls from constituents, upset about delays in mail service.

Before March -- prior to the pandemic being felt here in the Chicago area -- Cook County Health officials say less than 1% of mail-order drugs were delayed in the postal system.

Last month, they say, that percentage had grown to 23%.

Democratic Congressman Sean Casten says his office has received 2,000 calls from people complaining about the mail service.

"And we're getting calls from seniors, whether they're covered by the VA system or private insurance or Medicare or by Medicaid, saying, 'I'm not allowed to get more than 30 days of drugs at a time. And my mail hasn't shown up for four days.'"



Citing Healthcare Concerns, Lawmakers Urge Senate To Approve USPS Funds To Avoid Catastrophic Results

August 24, 2020

CHICAGO (CBS) — Local and national lawmakers are sounding the alarm about the crisis affecting the USPS, and want the U.S. Senate to approve the bill voted on over the weekend by the U.S. Congress.

“We’re here because we’re worried about the health and safety of the residents of Cook County,” said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. “As the U.S. Postal Service delays mount, more and more patients at Cook County Health are seeing longer wait times to receive critical medications, and our doctors pharmacists nurses and staff are concerned because the problem is growing.”

“Why did this postal issue become such a big national issue. Why won’t it go away. Why don’t we keep talking about it,” asked Illinois U.S. Senator Dick Durbin. “Because when it gets right down to it, the Postal Service is very personal to America, very personal.”

The House of Representatives on Saturday approved an additional \$25 billion in funding for the U.S. Postal Service and the reversal of recent operational changes that critics say delayed mail delivery. At a press conference ahead of the vote, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who called the rare Saturday session, called the Postal Service “as American as apple pie, motherhood, baseball.”

Called the “Delivering for America Act,” also ensures the Postal Service would not be able to implement any operational changes until January 2021, after the November election.

Durbin explained that seniors depend on the USPS to get their medications. He said according to the USPS, 1.2 billion prescriptions are delivered annually by the post office.

“Ninety percent of veterans get the VA prescriptions by the mail. We know that it’s something that people count on and look forward to. With so many patients postponing healthcare appointments due to COVID-19, opting to get their prescriptions delivered by mail, and the timely delivery of that mail is critically and personally important.”

Doctor Claudia Fegan is the Chief Medical Officer of the Cook County Health Department said the problem is affecting people who are not able to leave their homes.

“Cook County Health patients have experienced major delays and meal deliveries with immediate daily medication prescriptions due to the US Postal Service’s cut backs. We are worried about people being able to receive their medications on time without disruption,” Fegan said. “Our patients are seniors. They’re veterans. They are people who have mobility and transportation issues, and are at higher risk for COVID-19. We have some zip codes, where 50% of our mail order prescriptions were delayed.”

The bill approved Saturday heads to the Republican-led Senate. On Saturday, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell released a statement accusing House Democrats of “ignoring the urgent needs of American workers and families.”

Illinois U.S. Congressman Bobby Rush called McConnell “Mitch the Merciless” and asked that he, along with the rest of the Senate, vote to get the funding to the USPS.

“That Mitch the merciless show some mercy to our seniors, our elders, whose lives depend on the postal service and to deliver their mail,” Rush said.

Representative Sean Casten (D-IL 6th) said it's not just people who need their important prescriptions who are being affected. Businesses across the state are also being affected.

"We've had over 2,000 calls to our office these have been from small businesses wondering how it is that they're going to meet contractually mandated delivery deadlines when they're waiting for a part that isn't showing up, Casten said. "Why are we asking our citizens to choose between their health and their civic obligation to vote?"

He added that despite the mounting frustrations people have over the lack of timely deliveries, Casten asked that people be kind to the postal carriers and others in the post office who are doing their jobs as best they can.

"I just ask everybody to have some respect for the folks who are working hard to deliver the mail," Casten said. "Save your hostility towards those who are blocking their ability to do the job they want to do."

The Trump administration has faced fierce criticism over the handling of the USPS problems, including the appointment of Louis DeJoy as U.S. Postmaster General, because he is a major donor to Trump's campaign.

DeJoy, a Republican donor who assumed the role of postmaster general in June, said in a statement his initiatives would be suspended "to avoid even the appearance of any impact on election mail."

"The Postal Service is ready today to handle whatever volume of election mail it receives this fall," he said. "Even with the challenges of keeping our employees and customers safe and healthy as they operate amid a pandemic, we will deliver the nation's election mail on time and within our well-established service standards. The American public should know that this is our number one priority between now and election day."

The Senate reconvenes its session in September.



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DeJoy has downplayed delivery delays and said the agency is fully capable of processing this year’s mail-in ballots.

Representatives of Sinai Health System, University of Chicago Medicine and Amita Health said they haven’t recently seen delays in mail-order prescription delivery. Some health systems’ pharmacies use the postal service, while others use FedEx or UPS.



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DAILY JOURNAL

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CHICAGO (AP) — An official says operational changes at the U.S. Postal Service resulted in the delayed delivery last month of 5,000 prescriptions filled by Cook County Health’s mail-order pharmacy. Chief Medical Officer Dr. Claudia Fegan says the pharmacy normally fills more than 20,000 prescriptions monthly. Fegan said Monday 23% of those prescriptions were delayed, up from less than 1% in March. She said there were also delays in April and May, reaching 18% in June. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy appeared Monday before a U.S. House committee hearing on the operational changes. Democrats said the changes under DeJoy’s watch are causing widespread delays, but Republicans dismissed the worries as unfounded and part of a Democratic “conspiracy” against Trump.

County Health official reports prescription delivery delays

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CHICAGO (AP) — Changes at the U.S. Postal Service resulted in the delayed delivery in July of 5,000 prescriptions filled by Cook County Health’s mail-order pharmacy, an official said Monday.

Cook County Health Chief Medical Officer Dr. Claudia Fegan said the Chicago pharmacy normally fills more than 20,000 prescriptions monthly. She said 23% of those prescriptions were delayed, up from less than 1% in March. She said there were also delays in April and May, reaching 18% in June.

“This is yet another example of the impact that policy changes have on our vulnerable populations,” Fegan said. “They deserve to be able to receive their medication and not have to worry about how they’ll get to the pharmacy during a pandemic to get their medications.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the Postal Service into a central role in the 2020 elections, with tens of millions of people expected to vote by mail rather than in-person.

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy appeared Monday before a U.S. House committee hearing on the operational changes that have reportedly resulted in delivery delays nationwide. Democrats said the changes under DeJoy’s watch are causing widespread delays, but Republicans dismissed the worries as unfounded and part of a Democratic “conspiracy” against Trump.

DeJoy has downplayed delivery delays and said the agency is fully capable of processing this year’s mail-in ballots.

Representatives of Sinai Health System, University of Chicago Medicine and Amita Health said they haven’t recently seen delays in mail-order prescription delivery. Some health systems’ pharmacies use the postal service, while others use FedEx or UPS.

A man with persistent hiccups was found to also have coronavirus - but are the two related?

August 24, 2020

Persistent hiccups could potentially be a symptom of coronavirus, medical experts have warned.

Doctors from Cook County Health in Chicago have said that people with unusual symptoms such as hiccups should not be dismissed over coronavirus concerns.

The advice came after a man suffering with hiccups for several days went on to test positive for Covid-19, despite not displaying any other symptoms of the virus.

'Remain vigilant'

The doctors at Cook County Health urged "physicians [to] keep Covid-19 infections on their differential as more cases are discovered through atypical presentations."

They added that doctors should also remain "vigilant and maintain personal protective equipment to avoid exposure from the undifferentiated patient."

Hiccups prior to a positive test

The patient who tested positive after suffering from persistent hiccups was a 62 year old from Chicago, who was admitted to the hospital in April.

According to a case report, published in the American Journal of Emergency medicine, his doctors noted that he had unexplained weight loss. However, he did suffer from diabetes. The patient wasn't suffering from the usual telltale symptoms of coronavirus, such as a fever, or a sore throat.

By the time the patient was admitted and tested for coronavirus, he had been suffering from persistent hiccups for four days.

What are the most common coronavirus symptoms?

NHS England initially listed the main symptoms of coronavirus as a new and persistent cough and a high temperature. But, back in May, they added a loss of taste and smell to its official symptom list.

However, as scientists still have such a lack of data on and knowledge about the virus, these symptoms are not guaranteed to remain the only recognised ones.

What are some other possible symptoms?

Some doctors and scientists have suggested adding headaches and skin rashes to the official list of coronavirus symptoms, while some people who have recovered from the virus claimed it caused their hair to fall out.



TODAY: Multi-Agency Resource Center Opens To Help Residents Impacted By Severe Storms

August 24, 2020

A Multi-Agency Resource Center (MARC) will open today in Cook County to help residents recover from recent severe weather. The MARC is designed to allow residents to access disaster related relief services and information. The MARC brings together representatives from local and state agencies as well as essential support organizations. This unique recovery center is open to all Illinois residents impacted by recent storms.

“Helping our residents and our communities recover from a disaster is a priority for this agency,” said IEMA Director Alicia Tate-Nadeau. “A storm of this magnitude has had a devastating effect on those who live in these communities. A MARC can help expedite the recovery process by bringing together multiple service providers in a single location to provide on-site assistance. We are grateful to the local health department and various state agencies for their insight and cooperation to ensure we continue to provide the necessary resources to the residents who are recovering from this severe weather event.”

“This community was particularly impacted by severe weather earlier this month,” said William Barnes, executive director of Cook County’s Department of Emergency Management and Regional Security, “Our goal is to ensure residents have access to the resources they need to effectively recover.”

According to the National Weather Service (NWS), on Monday, August 10, a derecho produced wind gusts as high as 92 mph, and knocked down trees and power lines in numerous communities. In the Cook County town of Harvey, 94-percent of the community was without power for a week. The NWS also indicates this storm produced 15 confirmed tornadoes within the Chicago Warning Area.

All residents affected by the recent severe weather can visit the MARC at Thornton High School located at 15001 Broadway Avenue in Harvey. The facility will be open on Monday, August 24 and Tuesday, August 25 from 12:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

COOK/2222

State and local agencies offering assistance through the MARC include:

Department on Aging will assist older adults and their family caregivers with information on services and public benefits within the community; evaluate the problems and capacities of individuals to recover from the storm and attempt to address service gaps; provide follow-up services based on the older individual’s and family caregiver’s needs; deliver information regarding the wide range of services offered by the Aging Network. Seniors in need of assistance, but unable to attend the MARC can contact the agency via a toll-free hotline 1-800-252-8966.

Department of Human Services will assist residents seeking to replace Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits lost due to the storm. Literature will also be available to regarding mental healthcare, substance abuse programs, childcare needs and functional-needs support. For those who are unable to attend the MARC, but still need help with benefits, services or have eligibility questions can use the IDHS Customer Help Line 1-800-843-6154. Additionally, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) has a free helpline for residents who need emotional support during a crisis. Illinoisans can text "TALK" to 55-2020 (or "HABLAR" for Spanish) for the Call4Calm service.

Department of Insurance will be on hand to answer questions about individual insurance policies or questions about the insurance claim process as well as to address issues with individual insurance agents or insurance companies. People may also call the department's toll-free number at 866-445-5364.

Illinois Department of Veteran Affairs will have representatives on hand to guide residents on the process to replace lost documents. Referrals will also be available for additional services offered by IDVA. For those unable to attend the MARC, but would still like assistance can contact IDVA at 800-437-9824.

Illinois Attorney General representatives will be on hand to educate residents about how to report fraudulent contractors and scams as they recover from this event. People are encouraged to contact the Attorney General's Consumer Fraud Hotline at 800-386-5438 before hiring a contractor.

The Cook County Bureau of Economic Development will provide information about its COVID-19 Community Recovery Programs, providing support to residents and businesses who have been impacted by the pandemic and other recent emergencies. Program areas include: housing, mortgage, food, utility, job placement, emergency cash, applying for grants, securing a loan, finding shelter and business planning. Monday, August 24, 4:00 pm is the last day to apply for the COVID-19 Recovery: Rental Assistance Program administered by the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC). For more information about COVID recovery programs, visit www.cookcountyl.gov/recovery, For more information about HACC, visit www.thehacc.org or call (312) 663-5447.

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Cook County Health will share information about the medical services offered at Stroger and Provident Hospitals as well as its clinics in Blue Island, Robbins and Ford Heights. They will also provide details on financial assistance programs for health care.

Thornton Township will offer residents guidance regarding social services they offer such as general assistance and the Food Assistance Center, youth and adult Services and senior services. Individuals unable to attend may also reach Thornton Township at (708) 596-6040.

Protecting the Community during COVID-19

Upon arrival at the MARC, residents will be greeted in the parking lot and assigned a number. Residents will be encouraged to remain in their vehicle until their number is called to discourage congregating, and to limit the number of individuals inside the building at one time. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, only a limited number of people will be permitted in the building at one time and limited to one representative per family. Special accommodations will be made for elderly residents or those with special needs.

Once your number is called, residents will be given a health screening and temperature check. Masks are required for all individuals participating in the MARC. If a resident does not have a mask when they arrive, one will be made available at the door. Once the resident passes their health screening, they will be paired with a Service Ambassador who can help the residents navigate the facility and ensure their needs are addressed.

Janitorial services will be on site to conduct cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surface areas. Additionally, MARC representatives will be disinfecting their tables between each resident visit.

Emergency management officials are urging residents to be aware of the dangers associated with extended power outages and storm clean-up. To learn more about what to do before, during and after a storm visit www.ready.illinois.gov.

A renewed warning about COVID-19 at summer's end

August 24, 2020

A gathering of several families swimming and playing volleyball at a private inland Lake County beach in late July led to 16 positive cases of COVID-19.

It's a startling reminder of what health officials have been warning about for months: The virus can be transmitted outside as well as indoors, and children are at risk of infection just like adults.

The people involved in the Lake County case admitted to health officials they weren't always wearing masks or social distancing during their outing. Eleven of those infected were under age 18.

"Even outdoors, if you are in close proximity to people who don't live in your household, you're taking a risk," said Lake County Health Department spokeswoman Hannah Goering. "It is very important to wear a mask and maintain social distancing any time you gather with others."

As summer winds down, public health officials are racing to curb the spread of COVID-19. The effort includes issuing warnings and taking actions to reduce the risks of crowded outdoor gatherings. It's a message not resonating with everyone, as many enjoying the warm weather aren't wearing masks or keeping distance from others.

Crowd sizes are also an issue. Swimming along the city's lakefront has been banned all summer. Now suburban beaches in Evanston and Lake County limit visitors, having seen a surge of Chicagoans head north.

Beaches aren't the only concern.

In a media briefing, Chicago Public Health chief Dr. Allison Arwady recently told a story of a neighbor chatting with a man and woman outside their home for about 20 minutes with none of them wearing masks. All three later tested positive for the virus, she said.

Cook County is launching a social media campaign soon reminding young people about the importance of masks. Outside in open air is a safer environment than an indoor setting with poor air circulation, but the virus also spreads through close contact, even outdoors, said Dr. Rachel Rubin, senior medical officer at Cook County Department of Public Health.

"Being outdoors is much better than being inside because you have constant air movement, but it does not mean you are safe," Rubin said.

Health experts advise during the final weeks of summer to consider:

- If you're masked and others aren't, you are at risk.
- If you're wearing a thin mask and are in close proximity to a sick person, you're also at risk.
- If you're unmasked and close to others who are unmasked, you're at the greatest risk whether you're inside or outside.

The bottom line: Wear masks, stay at least 6 feet away and wash hands frequently.

"We're seeing a rise in cases because we're not doing good enough at our masking, social distancing and hygiene," said Dr. Micheal Lin, an epidemiologist and associate professor at Rush University Medical Center.

Lin and other experts say brief encounters, such as someone quickly walking by another person outside, doesn't pose much risk. But when someone is exposed to another person for 15 minutes and within six feet, there is a better chance of being infected. Some can spread the virus in a shorter amount of time.

No mask is 100% effective, and a study from Duke University warns that thin material neck gaiters and bandanas may not work to prevent infection.

A cloth or inexpensive surgical mask will "work good enough," said Dr. Robert Murphy, executive director of the Institute for Global Health at Northwestern University.

"The mask is just part of it," Murphy said. "Social distancing is just part of it. You improve your chances of not being infected three- to fivefold."

Health experts also advise parents to take precautions around youth activities.

As a leading expert on infectious diseases, Dr. Emily Landon spent the past several months imploring people to wear masks and keep their distance.

So when her 11-year-old son recently played in his first Western Springs Little League game of 2020, she was aghast when players, their families and coaches declined to wear masks or took them off during the game. Masks are encouraged but not required, the league website states.

After talking to league organizers, Landon, a researcher and associate professor of medicine at University of Chicago, said she was told parents weren't willing to go along with such a mandate. It was the last game for her son.

"Masking is really important for everyone, including children," Landon said. "If it's optional to have batting helmets, would the players wear them?"

Fear, Language Barriers Hinder Immigrant Contact-Tracing

August 21, 2020

Only a handful of contact tracers working to slow COVID-19 in 125 communities near Chicago speak Spanish, despite significant Hispanic populations. Churches and advocacy groups in the Houston area are trying to convince immigrants to cooperate when health officials call. And in California, immigrants are being trained as contact tracers to ease mistrust.

The crucial job of reaching people who test positive for the coronavirus and those they've come in contact with is proving especially difficult in immigrant communities because of language barriers, confusion and fear of the government.

The failure of health departments across the U.S. to adequately investigate coronavirus outbreaks among non-English speakers is all the more fraught given the soaring and disproportionate case counts among Latinos in many states. Four of the hardest-hit states -- Florida, Texas, Arizona and California -- have major Spanish-speaking populations.

In the ZIP code with the highest number of COVID-19 cases in Maryland, 56% of adults speak Spanish. But only 60 of Maryland's 1,350 contact tracers speak Spanish.

And the language barriers go beyond Spanish: Some areas of Kansas need tracers who also speak Somali. Minneapolis needs tracers who speak Oromo and Hmong, Chicago needs Polish speakers and Houston's Harris County is grappling with a population that includes Vietnamese, Chinese and Hindi speakers.

But even when health officials overcome language barriers, they still must dispel the deep suspicions raised among immigrants when someone with the government calls to ask about their movements in an era of hardline immigration enforcement under President Donald Trump.

"It should come as no surprise that people may be afraid to answer the phone," said Dr. Kiran Joshi, senior medical officer at the Cook County Department of Public Health, which serves 2.4 million people in communities just outside Chicago.

Exacerbating the challenges even further is the lag in getting COVID test results around the U.S., with waits routinely exceeding a week. The nation also is averaging more than 60,000 new cases a day, which has overwhelmed many laboratories.

All that can significantly affect tracers' ability to reach 75 percent of a patient's contacts within 24 hours of a positive test, a threshold that experts say is necessary to control outbreaks.

Officials say it's especially difficult to meet that threshold in immigrant communities.

Contact tracers take pains to reassure patients that nothing will be passed along to immigration officials, that they don't have to provide Social Security or insurance information, and that their contacts won't know who shared their names and phone numbers.

Still, "there are a lot of rumors and myths," said Hevert Rosio-Benitez, who oversees contact tracing for Harris County Public Health. "We do try to train our staff to be convincing enough to establish trust and tell them what the contact-tracing process is about, but we can only do so much with that."

So, every week, the health department meets with clergy, lawmakers and advocacy groups to get feedback and answer questions about immigrants' concerns "and tell them that we need the community participation so that we can be successful in curbing the virus," Rosio-Benitez said.

Many of those being approached are essential workers who worry about being sidelined for days or weeks awaiting test results, while others fear how members of their community will react to contracting the virus, said Fernando Garcia, founder and executive director of the El Paso, Texas-based Border Network for Human Rights.

"I believe there's a growing stigma about people being sick, so if you're infected you don't want to tell," said Garcia, whose group works with farm laborers.

The University of California-Irvine is trying to help counties by training people from low-income, minority areas to be contact tracers in their own communities, said Daniel Parker, an infectious disease epidemiologist and assistant professor of public health.

Tracers are provided with loose scripts to help with their calls, but "they already have the intuition (about) the best way to get the information and what to ask," he said. "They have the same lived experiences and know how to approach the community better."

In Maryland, state health officials have created public service announcements for both English and Spanish-language TV stations imploring people to pick up the phone when contact tracers call.

"The personal information we're asking for is totally protected," Dr. Michelle LaRue assures viewers in Spanish.

LaRue is a manager at CASA de Maryland, an immigration advocacy group that has partnered with health officials in Prince George's County just outside of Washington, D.C., to make the calls to Spanish speakers. She said earning trust begins with hiring contact tracers who not only speak Spanish but also intimately understand immigrant communities.

Ruth Rivera, who is from Puerto Rico, fits that mold.

"I feel the connection right away," said Rivera, a bilingual contact tracer with a company called HealthCare Dynamics International. "I know their fears."

In Illinois, Joshi said Cook County is planning to use a \$3 million state grant to expand its tracing program in the coming months, including public communication.

The department plans to partner with local organizations to help ensure that people in all communities know they could receive a phone call from health officials, that the caller ID will indicate clearly who's calling, and that "it's really important for the health of the public that folks pick up the phone," Joshi said.

Rosio-Benitez said his tracers' success rate currently is 40 to 50 percent because of a lack of cooperation overall -- especially in immigrant communities. Some of the patients "are very forthcoming," but others may identify people they've come in contacts but won't provide a phone number, he said.

Rosio-Benitez said about one-third of Harris County's 300 contact tracers speak Spanish, but that more are needed because the area's Hispanic population has been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Joshi said his department has few Spanish-speakers among its 25 tracers but plans to hire more, as well as people who speak Polish, Arabic and other languages.

"If the caller ... speaks one's own language, they're more likely to answer honestly and feel comfortable," he said.



Cook County Looking To Hire Contact Tracers

August 19, 2020

COOK COUNTY, IL — Cook County is looking to hire contact tracers for the suburban Cook County area. According to the Cook County Department of Public Health, the department currently has 25 contact tracers for the 2.5 million people who live in suburban Cook County.

The department wants to grow its team up to 400 in the fall. 300 will be hired in groups of 50-100 beginning in August, until there is a full team.

The first group of contact tracing and case investigator positions are 6-month positions. You can apply for the position online.



Flu shot and COVID-19: Health officials urge those eligible to get flu vaccine, avoid 'twindemic'

August 19, 2020

CHICAGO (WLS) -- Hospitals coping with COVID-19 cases could have a big fight on their hands this flu season.

So doctors are urging people to get their flu shots, in an effort to avoid a so-called "twindemic."

Flu season is just months away and health officials' calls for people to get vaccinated are even louder than ever.

"Everybody who is eligible to get vaccinated should get vaccinated," said Dr. Sharon Welbel, director of Hospital Epidemiology and Infection Control at Cook County Health.

This year, with the COVID-19 pandemic expected to coincide with flu season, doctors say, the concern over a possible "twindemic" underscores the need for people to get the flu vaccine.

"Last season we were seeing a lot of flu; we saw flu well into the spring while we were seeing COVID," Welbel said. "So that will happen again; we will be seeing flu, and we will be seeing COVID and there are patients that will have both at the same time."

Welbel said the flu vaccine will not only protect you and your family but help alleviate any possible strain on healthcare systems.

"And more importantly it will literally save lives," she said.

Walgreens announced this week their pharmacies are now offering flu shots with an increased supply to meet demand.

"We've had patients asking even before we ever got our flu shots, 'when are the flu shots gonna be here?'" Walgreens Pharmacy Manager Danielle Soriano said.

Those who get a flu shot at a Walgreens will need to wear a face mask and be screened for possible COVID-19 symptoms.

"It does take two weeks to become fully effective, so it is important to make sure you get it by the end of October is what the CDC recommends," Soriano said.

Cook County Health said every year less than 50% of adults in the U.S. get vaccinated. This flu season they hope that number jumps higher.

"Do things that we have control over so we can protect ourselves, protect our families and protect our communities," Welbel said. "We need to do a good job and we can do it, just everybody has to participate."



Flu Season Could Have Even Bigger Impact in Age of Coronavirus, Doctors Warn

August 19, 2020

The coronavirus already poses a serious threat to healthcare systems in the United States, but with the fall approaching, doctors and health officials are warning that a bad flu season could cause even greater challenges.

Dr. Sharon Welbel of the Cook County Health System says the effects on the healthcare system could be devastating if this year's flu season is as bad as ones in years past.

"We know that millions of people every year in the United States get influenza," Welbel said. "Thousands of people, probably over 60,000 people last year, died of the flu."

Now, with coronavirus cases on the rise in Illinois and many neighboring states, Welbel says the risk of some patients contracting both viruses is a very real and serious threat.

"People can get the flu and COVID at the same time, and one can imagine how incredibly ill one can become having both diseases at the same time," Welbel said. "The other issues are diagnostic difficulties, testing difficulties, access to vaccines and so forth."

Doctors have warned that patients exhibiting symptoms of the flu will likely have to be tested for coronavirus as well, as the two viruses do share some common symptoms.

One of the best ways to protect yourself against the flu, or to potentially ease the impact the virus can have on you, is to get a flu vaccine, and doctors are sounding the alarm this year that a flu vaccine could be more critical than ever.

"Everyone is eligible to get their flu vaccine, and you should get it every single year," Welbel said.

Besides the flu vaccine, Welbel says there are other encouraging signs for physicians hopeful to avoid a double-whammy of surges in COVID-19 and flu cases. In Australia, where flu cases are known to generally spike before spiking in the United States, the flu season has been light so far, giving some hope that this season's strain of the virus may not be as intense.

Scientists and doctors are also hopeful that the spread of the flu won't be as prevalent this year due to the protective steps that individuals are already taking to avoid coronavirus, including wearing masks, social distancing, and staying home when feeling ill.

"I'm hoping that this is true, but we as individuals have to be responsible," Welbel said. "We as individuals can make that happen by wearing our masks, social distancing and getting our flu vaccines. When COVID-19 vaccines are available, we should get vaccinated for that as well."



It's Flu Shot Time

August 19, 2020

Flu vaccines are now available, but how does the COVID-19 pandemic factor in? WBBM Newsradio's Jennifer Keiper reports.



Fear, Language Barriers Hinder Immigrant Contact-Tracing

August 19, 2020

Only a handful of contact tracers working to slow COVID-19 in 125 communities near Chicago speak Spanish, despite significant Hispanic populations. Churches and advocacy groups in the Houston area are trying to convince immigrants to cooperate when health officials call. And in California, immigrants are being trained as contact tracers to ease mistrust.

The crucial job of reaching people who test positive for the coronavirus and those they've come in contact with is proving especially difficult in immigrant communities because of language barriers, confusion and fear of the government.

The failure of health departments across the U.S. to adequately investigate coronavirus outbreaks among non-English speakers is all the more fraught given the soaring and disproportionate case counts among Latinos in many states. Four of the hardest-hit states -- Florida, Texas, Arizona and California -- have major Spanish-speaking populations.

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And the language barriers go beyond Spanish: Minneapolis needs tracers who also speak Somali, Oromo and Hmong, Chicago needs Polish speakers and Houston's Harris County is grappling with a population that includes Vietnamese, Chinese and Hindi speakers.

But even when health officials overcome language barriers, they still must dispel the deep suspicions raised among immigrants when someone with the government calls to ask about their movements in an era of hardline immigration enforcement under President Donald Trump.

"It should come as no surprise that people may be afraid to answer the phone," said Dr. Kiran Joshi, senior medical officer at the Cook County Department of Public Health, which serves 2.4 million people in communities just outside Chicago.

Exacerbating the challenges even further is the lag in getting COVID test results around the U.S., with waits routinely exceeding a week. The nation also is averaging more than 60,000 new cases a day, which has overwhelmed many laboratories.

All that can significantly affect tracers' ability to reach 75 percent of a patient's contacts within 24 hours of a positive test, a threshold that experts say is necessary to control outbreaks.

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Joseph Ortiz, a contact tracer with New York City's Health + Hospitals battling the coronavirus pandemic, disinfects his tablet...

Joseph Ortiz, a contact tracer with New York City's Health + Hospitals battling the coronavirus pandemic, disinfects his tablet after leaving a potential patient's home Thursday, Aug. 6, 2020, in New York.

Contact tracers take pains to reassure patients that nothing will be passed along to immigration officials, that they don't have to provide Social Security or insurance information, and that their contacts won't know who shared their names and phone numbers.

Still, "there are a lot of rumors and myths," said Hevert Rosio-Benitez, who oversees contact tracing for Harris County Public Health. "We do try to train our staff to be convincing enough to establish trust and tell them what the contact-tracing process is about, but we can only do so much with that."

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Many of those being approached are essential workers who worry about being sidelined for days or weeks awaiting test results, while others fear how members of their community will react to contracting the virus, said Fernando Garcia, founder and executive director of the El Paso, Texas-based Border Network for Human Rights.

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CHICAGO SUN★TIMES

Video visits, drive-up services, mobile apps: The new normal of seeing a doctor

August 19, 2020

Bringing her 14-year-old son, Alessandro, into Chicago for doctor's visits has been a heavy burden on Ramona Gonzalez.

As a baby, Alessandro's brain was deprived of oxygen and, as a result, he needs a ventilator to breathe, a feeding tube to eat, he's deaf and blind. In recent years, Gonzalez has had to bring her son from Matteson to La Rabida Children's Hospital on the South Side, which specializes in caring for medically complex chronically ill children. Sometimes, she has to load him in an ambulance along with his medical supplies and equipment.

"It's a lot," she said.

But over the past few months, Alessandro was able to see six doctors from La Rabida in three exams conducted over video. It was a godsend for Gonzalez during a pandemic she feared would endanger her son's life.

"It was really good," she said. "I don't want to risk him getting any disease."

One of the many things the pandemic has changed is the way people see their doctors. Almost overnight, patients began switching to so-called telehealth visits, a trend that's expected to last.

"We went from doing zero telehealth ... to within a week, we were doing 80% telehealth," said La Rabida Chief Medical Officer David Soglin. "Over time, we'll find the right balance. For some of these complex kids, maybe we do two personal and two telehealth visits a year. We're still learning."

Insurers largely didn't cover telehealth visits until March as the pandemic forced new practices. In Illinois, Gov. J.B. Pritzker called for an expansion. Around the same time, the federal agency that runs Medicare and Medicaid and private insurers agreed to reimburse doctors for such visits as they would for office appointments, something they weren't willing to do in the past. Doctors interviewed say telemedicine will expand as long as insurers pay. Multiple bills in Congress encourage it.

In a statement, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois, the dominant private insurer in Chicago, said it views "telehealth as a mode of delivering health care that will remain a part of our health care landscape."

More frequent contact

Proponents say telehealth creates opportunities for doctors and patients to stay in contact more frequently. Federal health officials cite telehealth as a tool to help prevent heart attacks, strokes and other conditions.

Still, doctors stress that video and phone exams have their limitations and patients are often asked to come in for personal visits to avoid potential mistakes. Medical errors already lead to tens of thousands of U.S. deaths a year, research shows.

Many visits to specialists, such as gynecologists or ophthalmologists, can only be done in person.

Advocates for children with a broad array of special health needs point to limitations as some intense therapies cannot be done virtually. And immunizations and early care require in-office exams.

“It works for some. It doesn’t work for others,” said Faye Manaster, a project director in Mokena with The Arc of Illinois Family to Family Health Information Center.

In addition to phone calls, as doctors and hospitals across Chicago worked to reduce the number of people coming in for appointments in recent months, they began offering video, or even drive-up options.

On Wednesdays, every patient seen by Dr. Sachin Shah is over video or by phone.

With the help of a medical assistant, patients are prepped much like they would be for a visit to the office, though they are reporting their own weight, blood pressure, pulse or additional information. Patients get a checklist in advance.

Prior to March, Shah, a primary care doctor and associate professor at University of Chicago, saw his patients in the office. But the pandemic and the resulting stay-home orders changed all that.

Now he’s telling a patient on a video screen to “push on your belly” and “show me where you have discomfort.”

In-person changes

For patients who do go to the doctor, they’re asked to come alone so not to crowd the waiting room. If a person is more than 10 minutes early, that patient has to wait in the car. Visitors are encouraged to use a mobile app to make appointments and check in, a sort of OpenTable for health care, Shah said.

University of Chicago and other hospitals are experimenting with curbside services, including blood draws for lab work and potentially vaccinations. Drive-up shots may be key to handling flu season while doctors and hospitals brace for another wave of coronavirus cases.

“Medical providers have been ready to do this for some time,” Shah said, referring to virtual visits.

Doctors at John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County had to make the switch to telehealth, with the majority of visits from April through early June done over the phone or video, said Dr. Claudia Fegan, chief medical officer of Cook County Health.

“Medicine was trying for years to get to telehealth and this dramatically accelerated it,” Fegan said of the pandemic.

The vast majority of those using telehealth were largely on government insurance plans or uninsured, mirroring the Cook County Health system’s overall patient profile, Fegan said. In addition to Stroger, the system includes 17 health clinics, Provident Hospital and Cermak Health Services, which treats county jail detainees.

The initial response from patients seen at Cook County was encouraging, Fegan said. While many patients don’t have personal computers or laptops, many have phones with video, she said.

“More people have smartphones than computers,” Fegan said. “That’s their way to access.”

In all, more than 85,000 telehealth visits took place at Cook County Health, according to health system figures.

At University of Chicago, the number of video and phone visits this year is around 90,000, conducted by about 1,000 doctors, nurse practitioners, social workers and other providers.

Advocate Health Care, the state’s largest health system with 10 Illinois hospitals and 350 health centers, has logged 325,000 telehealth visits this year, spokesman Mike Riopell said.

At Rush University Medical Center, video exams have been expanded to include thousands of urgent care consultations, almost 11,000 since March.

One big hope is telehealth can encourage more people to seek treatment early, theoretically keeping them out of the emergency rooms, said Dr. Meeta Shah, an emergency medicine doctor and associate chief medical informatics officer at Rush University Medical Center.

“This is a good opportunity for preventative care,” she said. “Preventative care is also important for keeping emergency rooms from becoming overwhelmed.”



Doctor To College Parents: Time For That COVID Talk With Your Kids

August 18, 2020

(WBBM NEWSRADIO) — A family medicine doctor is advising parents of college students to have a COVID talk with them before taking them to campus.

Dr. Nimmi Rajagopal says what happened recently at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill is a big example of why parents need to discuss tactics with their children to avoid the coronavirus.

More than 130 students at UNC contracted COVID-19 after a week of classes. On Tuesday, the University of Notre Dame announced classes will be moving online temporarily because of a spike in infections. Dr. Rajagopal said parents must impress on their young adults the necessity of hand-washing, carrying hand sanitizer, wearing masks and keeping a safe distance from others.

"The social distancing ... is probably the hardest thing for college kids," the physician said. "You really have to be able to maintain that. So, instead of hanging out in a common lounge inside, go outside right now. It's beautiful out."

Dr. Rajagopal concedes that standing up to peer pressure is difficult: "Even if you think, 'Yes, I should be wearing a mask,' it's really hard to say to somebody, 'Can you please put your mask on? Can you please move a little bit farther away?'"

Rajagopal says parents and their college students should also talk about plans should the young adults contract COVID-19.

COVID-19 Healthcare Disparities

August 17, 2020

Amid the healthcare disparities, the African American Community is rocked again by COVID-19. When you think things cannot worsen, COVID 19 has disrupted the birthing experience as well. The African American community has been hit harder by the virus due to the ongoing health disparities that exist due to a lack of access to adequate healthcare services. In addition to the disproportionate access to the healthcare system, it has completely changed the access to prenatal care and support systems during and after birth. This is a serious concern since many expecting African American mothers are already considered high risk mostly due to the racial/economic disparities across the nation. Several mothers have been diagnosed with high blood pressure and gestational diabetes, which could cause preterm labor, low birth weight, and even death in some cases.

Adding the additional stress and restrictions associated with the current state of the world with the ever-evolving COVID-19 virus makes matters worse. The COVID-19 virus has changed the way African American mothers' access to healthcare, specifically, prenatal care. Before the COVID-19 virus, the expectant mothers would go to the doctor's office for routine checks and important milestones during -their pregnancy journey. This virus has forced everyone to have virtual doctor visits, which prevent the doctor and patient's bonding relationship. Currently, doctors see their patients virtually via telehealth appointments with the help of computers/smartphones with cameras. The number of office visits has been significantly reduced because of COVID 19 virus in order to minimize the patient's and staff's exposure to the virus. Aisha Wright, Attending Physician of Family Medicine with Obstetrics at Stroger Hospital, has a patient population consisting of 95% African American, uninsured, underinsured, or high-risk individuals from underserved communities. Dr. Wright is a strong and outspoken advocate for her patients and families, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 virus has impacted the hospital birthing experience in addition to gaining access to supportive healthcare services. In preparation for the birthing process, the mother is given a COVID-19 test (rapid test reveal results in 12 hours as oppose to 24 hours in the past). Additionally, the virus has reduced the number of people that can be in the hospital during the birth, including family members and support service professionals. In the past, patients could bring up to three people in the delivery room.

Currently, the protocol includes only one person besides the mother, and that person must stay at the hospital the entire time. The additional person must bring an overnight bag and will have to eat food at the hospital because they cannot leave. The newborn baby receives a COVID-19 test and is separated from the mother until the test results come back. After the baby is born, the initial bonding time is a critical time for Moms and babies; they usually bond skin to skin or through breastfeeding. The babies can join the mother after she gets the results from the COVID test. This has also impacted induced labor scenarios, c-sections, and natural birthing methods. The time new mothers and babies spend at the hospital has significantly been reduced as a precaution.

Similarly, more African American families have been exploring the option of having a supportive service professional like a Doula. Before the virus erupted, Doula and Breastfeeding educators could assist new Moms before and after the birth of the new baby. Now Doulas and Breastfeeding educators are not allowed because of the hospital's strict COVID -19 guidelines. Because of this change, there is a heavy reliance on the Lactating Nurse, but she is overwhelmed and working at capacity by assisting all the new mothers. Kelly Robinson, the founder of Calm Mamas – Birthing Support services LLC, notes her clientele has dropped significantly due to the COVID-19 restrictions. As a doula, she supports Mom and Dad during the birthing process and helps parents advocate for their desired birthing outcome.

Mrs. Robinson of Calm Mama's suggests expectant mothers should research the hospital policies, be health advocates, and investigate home births or birthing centers (for low-risk pregnancies) to have a more pleasant and safer birthing experience.

Lastly, the amount of time the doctor gets to spend with their patients has significantly decreased. According to Dr. Wright, the virus has also reduced the amount of time doctors have within the labor and delivery department. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, there were 1 to 2 attending doctors on the floor. Now families can expect only 1 attending doctor for the entire labor and delivery department to lower the chance of contracting COVID-19. This significantly reduces the chance of the expectant mothers delivering the new baby with their desired doctor, which adds even more stress to the process. Many African American patients have expressed concerns about not being able to deliver their babies with the doctor they are comfortable with.

Wright suggests expectant mothers take all safety measures very seriously. Her suggestions include prenatal vitamins, vitamin D, washing hands, wearing masks, and practicing social distancing. She also suggests discussing your birthing plan before arriving at the hospital as it relates to pain control, breastfeeding, and skin to skin bonding methods with your spouse/support person.

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August 17, 2020

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"It should come as no surprise that people may be afraid to answer the phone," said Dr. Kiran Joshi, senior medical officer at the Cook County Department of Public Health, which serves 2.4 million people in communities just outside Chicago.

Exacerbating the challenges even further is the lag in getting COVID test results around the U.S., with waits routinely exceeding a week. The nation also is averaging more than 60,000 new cases a day, which has overwhelmed many laboratories.

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Still, "there are a lot of rumors and myths," said Hevert Rosio-Benitez, who oversees contact tracing for Harris County Public Health. "We do try to train our staff to be convincing enough to establish trust and tell them what the contact-tracing process is about, but we can only do so much with that."

So, every week, the health department meets with clergy, lawmakers and advocacy groups to get feedback and answer questions about immigrants' concerns "and tell them that we need the community participation so that we can be successful in curbing the virus," Rosio-Benitez said.

Many of those being approached are essential workers who worry about being sidelined for days or weeks awaiting test results, while others fear how members of their community will react to contracting the virus, said Fernando Garcia, founder and executive director of the El Paso, Texas-based Border Network for Human Rights.

"I believe there's a growing stigma about people being sick, so if you're infected you don't want to tell," said Garcia, whose group works with farm laborers.

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CHICAGO SUN★TIMES

Language barriers, fear hinders immigrant contact tracing

August 16, 2020

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But even when health officials overcome language barriers, they still must dispel the deep suspicions raised among immigrants when someone with the government calls to ask about their movements in an era of hardline immigration enforcement under President Donald Trump.

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Modern Healthcare

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Officials say it's especially difficult to meet that threshold in immigrant communities.

Contact tracers take pains to reassure patients that nothing will be passed along to immigration officials, that they don't have to provide Social Security or insurance information, and that their contacts won't know who shared their names and phone numbers.

Still, "there are a lot of rumors and myths," said Hevert Rosio-Benitez, who oversees contact tracing for Harris County Public Health. "We do try to train our staff to be convincing enough to establish trust and tell them what the contact-tracing process is about, but we can only do so much with that."

So, every week, the health department meets with clergy, lawmakers and advocacy groups to get feedback and answer questions about immigrants' concerns "and tell them that we need the community participation so that we can be successful in curbing the virus," Rosio-Benitez said.

Many of those being approached are essential workers who worry about being sidelined for days or weeks awaiting test results, while others fear how members of their community will react to contracting the virus, said Fernando Garcia, founder and executive director of the El Paso, Texas-based Border Network for Human Rights.

"I believe there's a growing stigma about people being sick, so if you're infected you don't want to tell," said Garcia, whose group works with farm laborers.

The University of California-Irvine is trying to help counties by training people from low-income, minority areas to be contact tracers in their own communities, said Daniel Parker, an infectious disease epidemiologist and assistant professor of public health.

Tracers are provided with loose scripts to help with their calls, but "they already have the intuition (about) the best way to get the information and what to ask," he said. "They have the same lived experiences and know how to approach the community better."

In Maryland, state health officials have created public service announcements for both English and Spanish-language TV stations imploring people to pick up the phone when contact tracers call.

"The personal information we're asking for is totally protected," Dr. Michelle LaRue assures viewers in Spanish.

LaRue is a manager at CASA de Maryland, an immigration advocacy group that has partnered with health officials in Prince George's County just outside of Washington, D.C., to make the calls to Spanish speakers. She said earning trust begins with hiring contact tracers who not only speak Spanish but also intimately understand immigrant communities.

Ruth Rivera, who is from Puerto Rico, fits that mold.

"I feel the connection right away," said Rivera, a bilingual contact tracer with a company called HealthCare Dynamics International. "I know their fears."

In Illinois, Joshi said Cook County is planning to use a \$3 million state grant to expand its tracing program in the coming months, including public communication.

The department plans to partner with local organizations to help ensure that people in all communities know they could receive a phone call from health officials, that the caller ID will indicate clearly who's calling, and that "it's really important for the health of the public that folks pick up the phone," Joshi said.

Rosio-Benitez said his tracers' success rate currently is 40 to 50 percent because of a lack of cooperation overall -- especially in immigrant communities. Some of the patients "are very forthcoming," but others may identify people they've come in contacts but won't provide a phone number, he said.

Rosio-Benitez said about one-third of Harris County's 300 contact tracers speak Spanish, but that more are needed because the area's Hispanic population has been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Joshi said his department has few Spanish-speakers among its 25 tracers but plans to hire more, as well as people who speak Polish, Arabic and other languages.

"If the caller ... speaks one's own language, they're more likely to answer honestly and feel comfortable," he said.



It's Time to Confront Senator Helms's Sexist, Racist and Homophobic Legacy

August 13, 2020

In 1973, the Supreme Court (7-2) struck down laws criminalizing abortion in the United States. That victory was *Roe v. Wade*. However, that same year, the United States adopted legislation that conditioned its foreign aid on denying abortion access to women in poorer countries that desperately relied on U.S. assistance.

That legislation, the Helms Amendment—named for the late, self-proclaimed bigot, Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.)—prohibits U.S. aid for pregnancy terminations. This amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act is now a permanent law and the consequences are devastating and horrific.

According to the World Health Organization, every year nearly 25 million women and girls around the world endure unsafe abortions. Notably, those most harmed by this U.S. law are vulnerable Black and Brown women.

Important lessons can be learned from pre-Roe history in America—as this represents current conditions for far too many girls and women in poor nations. Inaccessibility to legal abortions did not stop girls and women in the U.S. from ending their pregnancies—or trying to do so. The least fortunate bled to death in their beds, tubs or on kitchen tables after self-induced attempts to end their pregnancies. Those more fortunate made it to hospitals where doctors could try, but too often failed, to save their lives.

Medical wards in major cities filled with such patients. According to Leslie Reagan, author of *“When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States”*: “Some barely survived the bleeding, injuries and burns; others did not.” She examined data at Cook County Hospital and other medical facilities where entire wards were dedicated to treating “abortion-related complications.”

Annually, “[t]ens of thousands of women” in the United States sought emergency care following illegal abortions. Deaths were particularly common among women of color.

Some women survived, because they were sufficiently wealthy to travel abroad or to states where the procedure was legal, or they found doctors willing to document that their physical or mental health posed a great threat of danger. Some states permitted abortions if the woman could prove that she was sufficiently mentally unstable, emotionally fractured or would become so. We have yet to fully confront this ugly past.

That was life pre-Roe, and the Supreme Court has since recognized the grave inhumanity in denying women the dignity of determining their own reproductive future. The Court found “the right of privacy... is broad enough to encompass a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.” According to the Court, unwanted pregnancies dramatically constrained a young woman’s education and vocational opportunities. Shame and stigma accompanied single parenthood, including the prospect of being exiled from the home and community.

As Justice Harry Blackmun, author of the Court’s opinion, wrote:

“Maternity, or additional offspring, may force upon the woman a distressful life and future.”

The Helms Amendment was a cynical and cruel measure carried out by a powerful, self-described misogynist whose influence in the Senate (and ultimately the world) was far-reaching. The Helms Amendment was never centered on protecting women’s health and safety or respect for women’s intellectual, religious, or moral capacities. Senator Helms had little respect for women, people of color, or the LGBTQ community—as he made clear on numerous occasions.

In fact, after Senator Helms strong-armed and otherwise persuaded members of congress to pass the measure, he did not vote for the foreign aid package as he disapproved of U.S. foreign aid to developing countries.

He consistently fought against U.S. funding for HIV research, crudely arguing that homosexuality is “deliberate, disgusting, revolting conduct,” and the disease served as punishment. Helms considered it “common sense” to limit funding to combat HIV/AIDS, because the “disease [is] transmitted by people deliberately engaging in unnatural acts.” He opposed a 1988 appropriations bill that would increase funding for AIDS programs, explaining, “We have to call a spade a spade, and a perverted human being a perverted human being.”

Senator Helms’s scorn was not reserved for gay men. In opposition to the nomination of Roberta Achtenberg, a nominee for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), he told the Washington Times and repeated to the Washington Post: “She’s not your garden-variety lesbian.” Rather, “she’s a damn lesbian. I’m not going to put a lesbian in a position like that.”

Similarly with regard to race, a Wall Street Journal obituary described his racism in fundraising, noting that “[o]ne direct-mail plea... for his campaign read: ‘Your tax dollars are being used to pay for grade school classes that teach our children that CANNIBALISM, WIFE-SWAPPING, and the MURDER of infants and the elderly are acceptable behavior.’” This is what he thought of Black people in North Carolina.

Senator Helms wielded homophobic and racist ideology like a sharp blade, referring to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and civil rights leaders as “communists and sex perverts.” Senator Helms articulated these beliefs in the halls of Congress even when others in his home state and fellow senators began to disavow arcane, racist and sexist views—particularly as related to national policy concerns.

However, Senator Helms’s record on women’s equality was unequivocally dangerous—to lingering effect. The Helms Amendment prevents U.S. development assistance from reaching the most vulnerable girls and women in the poorest countries, including those that have been raped, suffered from incest, or sexually trafficked by rogue gangs.

The policy has been deadly in war-torn countries where girls and women are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and unintended and unwanted pregnancies.

The Helms Amendment and other U.S. policies such as the Mexico City Policy (known as the global gag rule) shackle women abroad to the less than equal destinies politically imposed on them. Both laws undermine the creation of vital reproductive health infrastructures and result in the full-scale ban of abortion and sometimes difficulties in obtaining contraception.

In some developing countries that receive U.S. foreign aid, abortion is simply illegal and criminalized—even in cases of rape and incest. Not surprisingly, then, in countries like El Salvador and Nicaragua, miscarriages are sometimes treated with suspicion and can lead to arrest and lengthy incarceration.

For these reasons and more, members of Congress should join Reps. Jan Schakowksy (D-Ill.), Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), Diana DeGette (D-Colo.), Jackie Speier (D-Calif.), Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), Norma Torres (D-Calif.) and Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.)—who are sponsoring the “Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act,” the first-ever legislation to repeal the Helms Amendment.

As they know, legal abortions are as safe as a penicillin shot. Even in the U.S., a person is 14 times more likely to die by carrying a pregnancy to term than by having an abortion.

It’s time to repeal the Helms Amendment and replace it with sound policy that supports full reproductive healthcare access. That is what women abroad deserve: our respect. Coercive policies that undermine women’s privacy, autonomy and dignity should have no place among U.S. laws governing women at home or abroad.



Gov. Pritzker Announces Six Appointments to Illinois Boards and Commissions

August 11, 2020

Gov. Pritzker Announces Six Appointments to Illinois Boards and Commissions

Building on a strong team of diverse experts in their fields, Governor JB Pritzker announced the following appointments in his administration:

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

Teresa Smith will serve on the Civil Service Commission.* Smith currently works as Executive Director of Human Resources at the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. Prior to that, Smith served as Deputy Director, Bureau of Personnel with the Department of Central Management Services at the State of Illinois. Smith is a member of the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), the FBI Citizens Academy Alumni Association, the Illinois Public Employer Labor Association and lead member of the SIU COVID-19 Response Team. Smith earned her Bachelor of Science from Illinois College and Masters of Business Administration from the University of Illinois at Springfield.

ILLINOIS FINANCE AUTHORITY

Roxanna Nava will continue to serve on the Illinois Finance Authority.* Nava was appointed to the Illinois Finance Authority in 2019. She is the Executive Director of Metropolitan Family Services North Center and Evanston/Skokie Valley Center. Prior to joining the Metropolitan Family Services, Nava served as the Chief Small Business Officer for the City of Chicago, where she helped start and grow more than 70,000 businesses. Her prior roles include serving as Director of the State of Illinois Division of Financial Institutions, Assistant Director for the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Vice President with The Northern Trust Company. Her civic and community involvement is extensive, including Leadership of Greater Chicago's board, the Cook County State's Attorney Latino Advisory Council, the Illinois Latino Family Commission, the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation, and City Colleges of Chicago's board. Her civic recognitions consist of the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Leadership Award, the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation Leadership Award, and being a Fellow of Leadership Greater Chicago. Nava earned her Master of Business Administration from National Louis University and her Bachelor of Science in Finance from DePaul University.

ILLINOIS INTERNATIONAL PORT DISTRICT BOARD

P.S. Sriraj will serve on the Illinois International Port District Board. * Sriraj is currently a Research Associate Professor and the Director of the Urban Transportation Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Sriraj leads the Urban Transportation Center by working on research projects, teaching graduate courses, advising students and advising public policy focused on transportation. In addition, Sriraj serves as an Adjunct Associate Professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. Sriraj serves on the Transportation Committee of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and as Director in the Executive Committee of Council of University Transportation Centers. He is a member of CUTC, APTA, and the Transportation Research Forum. He was recently awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from Marquis Who's Who. Sriraj earned his undergraduate degree in Civil Engineering from the Birla Institute of Technology & Science and his PhD in Civil Engineering from the Illinois Institute of Technology.

Averil Edwards will serve on the Illinois International Port District Board. * Edwards is currently the Managing Counsel on Environmental, Health & Safety at United Airlines, Inc. Previously, she served as Associate at Winston & Strawn LLP.

Edwards serves as volunteer at Equip for Equality, Cabrini-Green Legal Aid Clinic, and the National Immigrant Justice Center. She is a member of the Illinois Bar and Black Women Lawyer's Association of Greater Chicago. Edwards earned her Bachelor of Arts in English from Oakwood University and Juris Doctorate from the University of Chicago Law School.

KASKASKIA REGIONAL PORT DISTRICT BOARD

Mark Chatham will serve on the Kaskaskia Regional Port District Board. * Chatham is currently a Journeyman with the Steamfitters Local 439. Chatham previously worked as a Journeyman for the East St. Louis Carpenters Local 169. Chatham is Trustee for the Delegates for Southern Illinois Building Trades and has received the Community Service Award from Central Illinois Labor Trades. Chatham earned a high school diploma from Belleville Township Highschool East and received an Apprenticeship Certificate of Completion from the United Brotherhood of Carpenters.

STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

Pilar Guerrero will serve on the State Board of Health. * Guerrero is currently Attending Physician at John H. Jr. Stroger Cook County Hospital and Assistant Professor at Rush Medical Center. Guerrero has contributed to research, book chapters, and publications focused on medical research and medicine. She has also provided several lectures, courses and interviews. She currently volunteers for the NHMA UIC Medical School LMSA, Social Determinants of Health and Emergency Medicine- Cultural Awareness and Language/Disparities in Healthcare and Health Equity, Illinois College of Emergency Medicine Medical Spanish/Culture Course, Medical Organization for Latino Advancement (MOLA) Board of Directors, Mentor for Underrepresented Medical Students, 4-Men Only Community Health Fair, the Illinois Medical Emergency Response Team (IMERT) and the Oral Board Examiner for ICEP Review Course. She is a member of National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA) Board of Directors, NHMA, NHMA Annual Conference Planning Committee, NHMA Midwest Regional Chair and the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP). Guerrero earned a Bachelor of Science, Majors in Nursing and Spanish Language and Literature from Northern Illinois University and Doctor of Medicine from the University of Michigan Medical School.

* Appointments pending confirmation by the Illinois Senate.

Growth of new COVID-19 cases trending downward in some suburbs, increasing in others, new data shows

August 11, 2020

Some north and west suburban suburbs are seeing the growth of COVID-19 cases trending downward, though new cases are still being reported, according to new data from the Cook County Department of Public Health.

In addition to reporting cumulative cases of COVID-19 within suburban Cook County on its website, the health department has added a “recent percent change” in new cases by municipality. According to the health department, the percentage change is calculated “by comparing counts from the past 14 days to the 14 days preceding that Negative numbers mean a town is likely trending down in new cases reported. Positive numbers mean a town is likely trending up.”

The communities of Park Ridge, Niles, Des Plaines, Glenview and River Forest saw percentage decreases under this calculation, while the communities of Morton Grove, Lincolnwood, Franklin Park, Harwood Heights, Norridge, River Grove and Northlake saw increases, according to the health department.

Not included in the county’s percent change calculation are Evanston, Oak Park and Skokie, which are monitoring COVID-19 cases through their own health departments.

The following shows the cumulative number of COVID-19 cases in 17 north and west suburbs as of Aug. 11, with a comparison to the number of cases reported two weeks earlier, based on data provided by the Cook County Department of Public Health and local health departments.

Also included are the total number of COVID-19-related deaths by municipality, as reported by the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office, since March 16.

- Des Plaines: 2,018, up from 1,916 cases; 104 deaths total; 3 new deaths.
- Skokie: 1,170, up from 1,104 cases; 44 deaths total; 1 new death.
- Niles: 1,045, up from 998 cases; 138 deaths total. 1 new death.
- Evanston: 910, up from 859 cases; 70 deaths total. No change.*
- Glenview: 754, up from 709 cases; 50 deaths total. 1 new death.
- Elmwood Park: 513, up from 473 cases: 24 deaths total. No change.*
- Franklin Park, 444, up from 407 cases; 11 deaths total. No change.
- Park Ridge: 416, up from 384 cases, 41 deaths total. No change.
- Oak Park: 491 (as of Aug. 10), up from 431 cases; 27 deaths total. 1 new death.
- Morton Grove: 389, up from 350 cases; 18 deaths total. No change.
- Norridge: 370, up from 335 cases; 32 deaths total. 2 new deaths.
- Northlake: 340, up from 304 cases; 11 deaths total. 1 new death.
- Lincolnwood: 247, up from 214 cases; 24 deaths total. 1 new death.
- Harwood Heights: 186, up from 163 cases; 6 deaths total. No change.
- River Grove: 172, up from 158 cases; 7 deaths total. No change.
- Rosemont: 76, up from 70 cases; 1 death total. No change.
- River Forest: 113, up from 105 cases; 1 death total. No change.

Updated Cook County health department data can be found at ccdphcd.shinyapps.io/covid19.

Preckwinkle: Dramatic rise in suicides among Cook County's Black population

August 9, 2020

Cook County is seeing a dramatic increase in suicides among Black residents.

"There have been more suicides so far this year in the Black community than in all of 2019," Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said. "Most notably, we are seeing an increase in youth suicide. The youngest victim this year was just 9 years old."

The African American community has borne the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic, opioid overdose deaths and rising homicide rates, she added.

The Cook County medical examiner's office reports 2020 is on pace to be the worst year for suicides in the Black community in a decade.

So far, there have been 58 suicide deaths among Blacks compared to 56 in all of 2019. Nearly 80% of suicides were men, 40% were under 30, three were under 18, and the youngest was the 9-year-old boy who died July 5.

Mental health support

Anxiety and depression are high among Blacks, who disproportionately have been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and also suffer health disparities, high rates of unemployment and poverty, said Dr. Diane Washington, Cook County Health director of behavioral health.

"We need to have a conversation about mental health and suicide," said Washington, a psychiatrist for more than 28 years.

"There's a lot of stigma in our own community about mental health. ... The shame that goes with mental health is huge in our community. This pain is unbearable, and this despondency and this despair is huge. It has overtaken our community."

Anyone experiencing suicidal thoughts should call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-8255.

Cops building bonds

Building relationships, constant interactions and conversations with students help deter threats to school safety, says Streamwood police officer Courtney Stoiber, a school resource officer at Tefft Middle School in Streamwood.

Stoiber is among a cadre of resource officers stationed at Elgin Area School District U-46 middle and high schools. She is trained in crisis intervention.

"It's highly focused on de-escalation and identifying persons in crisis ... with mental or physical disabilities, on the autism spectrum, with mental illnesses or other emotional needs," she said. "It's about verbally counseling them through that crisis and referring them to staff or resources to better address their needs."

Minority student arrests

At U-46, student arrests for behavioral infractions are down from 343 in the 2013-14 school year to 36 in 2019-20. The majority of arrests during that period involved Black and Hispanic students.

Latinos constitute nearly 55% of the district's 38,395 students, followed by whites 26%, Asians 8%, Blacks 6% and two or more races 3%, data show.

Rich Bosh, a Bartlett police detective who has served 14 years as a resource officer for Bartlett High, was part of an oversight committee reviewing district policies and procedures for identifying students as threats. He started a safety task force at the school that gives students a say in school culture.

"Kids really took ownership of the school," Bosh said. "That was a really good thing that we hope to build on with other schools."

Mentoring students

John Heiderscheidt, U-46 director of school safety and culture, said officials are considering expanding student mentoring through resource officers.

A group of parents is pushing student-led violence prevention/safety programs to reduce bullying and build relationships, such as the "See something, say something" initiative started after the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut.

"Our officers are helping to build those programs at a grass-roots level," Heiderscheidt said. "Students are leading the effort to grow that."

The district will be asking resource officers to provide A.L.I.C.E. (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) active shooter response training for school employees.

The Elgin Police Department also trains its officers in the Handle with Care program.

"It's an excellent way to be a trauma-informed care community," Heiderscheidt said.

Youth services

The Youth and Family Center of McHenry County is offering a socially distanced summer park program, including music, self-defense training, martial arts, sports and a free lunch, for at-risk students with food insecurity.

"Any normal year, we would have had anywhere from 45 to 55 kids," Executive Director Guadalupe Ortiz said. "We are now having 10 kids at a time. We are really trying to focus on our after-school program to support the coming needs for remote learning for a lot of our kids."

The McHenry-based agency serves roughly 500 clients, including youths and adults, through prevention programs, bicultural service navigation and social-emotional supports. They are mostly low-income, minority and uninsured families, many of whom have suffered job loss due to the pandemic.

Growing food insecurity

Officials at the Northern Illinois Food Bank in Geneva are anticipating an uptick in need for food support as pandemic unemployment benefits run out and the state's moratoriums on evictions and utility cutoffs expire by month end.

"In June, we distributed 9.5 million meals' worth of food in all of our counties," spokeswoman Liz Gartman said.

"Typically, it's like in the 5 million range. It is pretty uncharted for us."

In 2018-19, the agency distributed more than 69 million meals, mostly in DuPage and Kane counties. That grew to about 80.3 million meals in the fiscal year that ended June 30.

"We distributed 30 million of those meals during COVID-19 from March to June," said Gartman, adding that people served include low-income, minorities and a lot of newly poor families.



DJ Casper uplifts Cook County healthcare workers with a socially distanced 'Cha Cha Slide'

August 5, 2020

DJ Casper talks about the timeless legacy of 'Cha Cha Slide' and how he's giving back to healthcare workers during these turbulent times.

County working on plan to reverse rise in Black suicides — ‘crisis that once again hits the African American community the hardest’

August 4, 2020

After seeing a spike in suicides in an African-American community already devastated by COVID-19 and other tragedies, Cook County officials said Tuesday they’re working on a prevention plan to hopefully begin to mitigate the “horrifying” trend of more Black people dying by suicide.

“We have no choice but to do better,” Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said.

The county’s plan is being built “as we speak,” Dr. Diane Washington, the executive director of behavioral health at Cook County Health, said at a Tuesday news conference focused on the rise in suicides.

“We’re responding to the current data and needs that are presented before us,” Washington said. “Hopefully, before the end of the year we will have a comprehensive program in place.”

The potential cost and details of the plan are things the county is “looking at right now” as they begin to connect to community organizations and others that focus on suicide prevention and awareness.

So far this year, there have been 246 deaths by suicide, 58 of them in the Black community, said Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, the county’s medical examiner.

By contrast, 56 Black people died by suicide for all of 2019. Of those deaths in 2020, nearly 80% were men and 40% were under 30 years old — the youngest was nine years old.

“This is horrifying,” Preckwinkle said. “It’s not surprising that communities that have suffered the most are the ones who also have the least. The disinvestment, the redlining, systemic racism has culminated in a crisis that once again hits the African-American community the hardest.”

The plans for a suicide prevention plan follows an analysis done by The Trace, and [published by the Chicago Sun-Times](#), that looked into the staggering rise in suicide among Black people.

The spike marks yet another grim milestone the county has reached during the pandemic. On top of COVID-19 deaths, the county’s medical examiner’s office has already handled more homicide cases than all of 2019, and the number of opioid deaths is also outpacing 2019 figures.

Washington, who has been a psychiatrist for over 28 years, said factors contributing to the rise in suicides include some “cultural aspects of Black America,” such as a stigma around seeking mental health care and a shame that comes with mental health in the Black community, which Washington said is “huge.”

“There is an overwhelming sense of isolation and despair, hopelessness that occurs during this pandemic that shifts the curve to another level,” Washington said, adding that the pandemic has taken away the usual supportive structures, such as school and other activities, that some young Black people turn to.

“We need to approach this situation in a very systematic way.”



‘We Have No Choice But to Do Better’: Cook County Pledges to Address Increase in Black Suicides

August 4, 2020

Cook County health officials say they are developing a suicide prevention plan in response to an alarming increase in suicides among Black residents this year.

At an [August 4 news conference](#), officials said the plan would be released in stages, with a comprehensive version published by the end of the year. They did not provide specifics on the plan’s content or cost. In addition to the plan, officials said they had started training health care providers on suicide prevention.

Halfway through 2020, the number of Black residents of Cook County who’ve died by suicide has already surpassed last year’s total. “Ignoring the issue until it becomes a crisis has become the method of treatment,” says one mental health advocate.

The announcement comes days after a report by [The Trace](#), co-published by the [The Chicago Sun-Times](#), that found that Cook County has already recorded more suicides of Black residents as of mid-July than in all of last year. If the pace continues, 2020 could see more Black suicides than any year in a decade.

“This is horrifying,” said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. “It’s not surprising the communities that suffered the most are the ones who also have the least. The disinvestment, the redlining, [and] the systemic racism have culminated in a crisis that once again hits the African-American community the hardest. We have no choice but to do better.”

Diane Washington, the director of behavioral health for Cook County Health, described the effort as “all-hands-on-deck,” and said the county has to develop relationships in order to expand existing health services in communities of color.

“African-Americans are in some of the most vulnerable communities in the Chicagoland, including the South Side and the West Side, and that hasn’t changed for a long period of time,” said Washington. “So we have to address this issue head on, early, and try to manage it and provide structures to make that happen.”

Washington said the county’s Behavioral Health Consortium, an initiative launched in 2016, is working with community partners to spread awareness about mental health services.

Chicago has just five city-funded mental health clinics for its nearly three million residents following a closure of six clinics in 2012 under then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel. A separate, publicly funded health clinic is now operated by the Cook County Health. Mental health advocates and professionals told The Trace that the remaining private and nonprofit services available are not enough to meet the current need. Some private clinicians and therapists say their client load has doubled during the pandemic.

Both the county and the Chicago Department of Public Health have expanded telehealth services during the pandemic. CDPH said it is planning to issue proposals to expand existing mental health services and to create a suicide prevention plan. The city has also allocated \$1 million to suicide prevention services.

Amika Tendaji, a longtime mental health advocate and the executive director of Black Lives Matter Chicago, described the city's existing public mental health services as "just not good enough."

"It's intentional disinvestment in public health to offload to privatized services," she said.

While Washington acknowledged that many Black Cook County residents face barriers to accessing services, she also said that stigma attached to mental illness in Black communities is "huge." She added that Black men and youth are plagued by systemic racism, in addition to not having grandmothers "who would pick up the slack."

"This rise in suicides is due to a pandemic that has us in an economic crisis, people don't have what they need, this is not because grandmothers are less accessible," Tendaji said.

The uptick in suicides coincides with historic increases in gun violence and opioid overdoses in Cook County, all of which disproportionately affect Black men. More than 40 percent of Black suicide deaths this year involved a gun; the median age of the victims was 36, and the youngest was 9 years old, according to medical examiner data. Most of the deaths occurred in Chicago, on the city's South and West Sides, data shows.

"By the time these residents come to our office," said Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, "it is too late."



Preckwinkle: 2020 on Pace to be Worst Year for Suicides in Black Community in a Decade

August 4, 2020

More African Americans in Cook County have died by suicide this year than during all of 2019, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle announced Tuesday.

"Most notably we're seeing an increase of suicide among our young people. The youngest victim this year was only 9 years old," Preckwinkle said. "This is horrifying."

According to the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office, 58 Black residents have died by suicide so far this year, surpassing the 2019 total of 56.

"2020 is on pace to be the worst year for suicides in the Black community in a decade," Preckwinkle said. "There's no single explanation for the rising number of suicides, but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, anxiety and depression has increased among Black Americans in general amid the COVID-19 pandemic."

Cook County Medical Examiner Ponni Arunkumar said her office had confirmed 218 deaths due to suicide at this time last year, with 33 of those deaths in the Black community. "This year we're at 246 deaths due to suicide, and 58 of those decedents are African American," she said.

Arunkumar says the county is on pace to double the number of deaths by suicide this year, and attributes the rise to "an increase in the deaths due to suicide among Black residents – nearly 80% were men and 40% were under the age of 30; three were under the age of 18," she said.

The death of the 9-year-old is especially difficult to deal with, Arunkumar said. "It's impossible to come to terms with a child who felt so hopeless he believed his only recourse was to take his own life," she said. "I believe if we work together we can prevent many of these deaths."

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle talks about the rise in deaths by suicide in the Black community at a press conference on Tuesday, Aug. 4, 2020. (Toni Preckwinkle / Facebook)

Dr. Diane Washington, executive director of behavioral health at Cook County Health, said contributing factors need to be analyzed, including health disparities in Black communities and Black attitudes toward mental health and suicide.

"There's a lot of stigmas in our community about mental health," she said, citing examples to "keep it in the family," or abide by a code of silence. "The shame that goes with mental health is huge in our community. Religion plays a huge piece in that: 'You're going to go to hell if you commit suicide.'"

These factors influence whether a Black person seeks care, as well as the misconception that Black people don't experience pain or know how to express emotional pain, according to Washington.

"This pain is unbearable and this despondency and despair is huge. It's overtaken our community and we need to get serious about managing it," she said. "There's an overwhelming sense of isolation, despair, hopelessness that occurred during this pandemic that shifted the curve to another level."

Washington says a holistic approach to mental health is needed. “We need to approach this situation in a very systemic way,” she said, and look at treatable causes, assemble resources and navigate coordination of services, and take preventive measures. It’s also important to address systemic racism as it affects health disparities in Black communities, she said.

The county is working on a suicide prevention plan which it hopes to have in place before the end of the year, according to Washington. “We are building it as we speak and responding to the current data (and) needs presented before us,” she said.

The county is also “educating all staff around the key components of suicide and what that looks like and how to manage it,” Washington said. “We have to educate all of the providers so they can spot suicidal ideation or issues around that suicide so they can intervene immediately.”

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the National Suicide Prevention Line by phone (1-800-273-8255) or chat (suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

With 2020 on pace to be the worst year in a decade for Black suicides, Cook County officials sound alarm on yet another ‘horrifying’ pandemic

August 4, 2020

As the number of Black people who died by suicide so far this year in Cook County surged past 2019’s entire total, county officials say they are seeing an all-too-familiar story of entrenched disinvestment driving another public health crisis.

At least 246 people have died by suicide in 2020, 58 of whom were Black, county officials announced in a Tuesday news conference. In all of 2019, 56 Black people died from suicide, and this year’s final toll among is on pace to become the worst in a decade.

The youngest victim so far in 2020 was a 9-year-old Black boy who died in Chicago last month, according to the medical examiner’s office.

“This is horrifying. It’s not surprising the communities that have suffered the most are the ones who also have the least,” Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said. “The disinvestment, the redlining, the systemic racism has culminated in a crisis that once again hits the African American community the hardest. We have no choice but to do better.”

Though the majority of people who died by suicide in Cook County over the past decade, including this year, were white, Black suicides are on pace to double from last year, Cook County Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Ponni Arunkumar said.

The announcement by county officials comes a week and a half after The Trace first [reported a sharp increase](#) in suicides among Black people.

Most of the Black suicides are concentrated in the South and West sides, Arunkumar said. Almost 80% of the victims were men and 40% were under 30 years old. Three were children, including the 9-year-old, whose death left Arunkumar’s office particularly shaken, she said.

“While our office is used to dealing with death, it is impossible to come to terms with a child who felt so hopeless he believed that his only recourse was to take his own life,” Arunkumar said. “As I’ve said that many times now, the deaths we deal with in our office are by and large preventable.”

At the same time, the medical examiner’s office workload eclipsed 9,500 cases for 2020 so far — compared to the average year that brings fewer than 6,300 cases, Arunkumar said. (The office investigates certain cases out of the annual 40,000-or-so deaths in Cook County.) There have been more than 4,900 COVID-19 deaths, likely more than 1,300 opioid overdose deaths and close to 550 homicides this year.

All four of these public health crises — coronavirus, [opioid overdoses](#), homicides and suicides — are especially prevalent on the South and West sides, Arunkumar said.

Preckwinkle cautioned there is no one cause of the spike in suicides but noted a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study that [found increased anxiety and depression](#) among Black Americans during the coronavirus

pandemic. The intertwining crises in Black neighborhoods are what Preckwinkle said is the result of decades of poverty from inequitable government policies.

“Black communities have been dealing with all the issues poverty creates: violence, poor mental health and physical health, drug use and suicide,” Preckwinkle said. “It’s time to shine a light and keep conversation going around anxiety and depression in the Black community.”

The county is working on a suicide prevention plan that likely will be rolled out before the end of the year, said Dr. Diane Washington, executive director of behavioral health at Cook County Health. She said they especially need more community health workers to reach out to Cook County residents and help them navigate mental health care.

Washington also addressed the long-standing traumas plaguing Black youth, from racism to housing instability, long before the pandemic upturned their neighborhoods.

“This pain is unbearable, and this despondency and despair is huge,” Washington said. “It’s overtaken our community. And we need to get serious about managing it.”

County issues recommendations for new COVID-19 restrictions in suburbs

August 4, 2020

Bars, personal service businesses and parties should return to more restrictive COVID-19 [mitigation guidelines](#) as infection numbers increase in suburban Cook County, according to the Cook County Department of Public Health.

In an advisory posted Aug. 3, CCDPH issued guidance for measures in bars, fitness clubs, personal care businesses and other settings designed to slow the spread of COVID-19. The measures are based on Tier 1 mitigation measures in the Restore Illinois Mitigation Plan.

COVID-19 cases are increasing in suburban Cook, especially among young adults in their 20s, health officials said. The daily count of new COVID-19 cases has reached levels previously seen in March. COVID-19 rates for people in their 20s are now about 2.5 times higher than they were at the end of March, and this age group now has the highest rates of COVID-19.

As of July 31, there was an eight-day increase in COVID-19 positivity rates in suburban Cook County, based on a 7-day rolling average, and a two-day increase in hospital admission increases.

On July 31, the positivity rate was 5.8 percent in suburban Cook County, up from 5.2 percent July 22. These are two of the metrics from the Restore Illinois Mitigation Plan that indicate the need for mitigation at this time.

This guidance applies to suburban Cook County, with the exception of Evanston, Skokie and Oak Park.

Recommendations include:

Bars, taverns, breweries and other establishments that serve alcohol for on-site consumption without a retail food license are being asked to serve customers outdoors only.

Restaurants that serve alcohol must continue to abide by ongoing COVID-19 guidance and existing regulations.

Maximum party size and table occupancy at restaurants, bars, taverns, and breweries should be reduced to six people (indoor or outdoor).

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

Personal service businesses should discontinue services (shaves, facials) that require the removal of face coverings.

Residential property managers should limit guest entry to six people per unit to avoid indoor gatherings and parties.

Businesses should institute remote work for high-risk individuals and continue to support telework for as many workers as possible.

Retail establishments should maintain no more than 50 percent capacity, which is the current recommendation

Cook County recommends further COVID-19 restrictions for suburban bars, other businesses to voluntarily follow

August 3, 2020

Cook County officials issued health guidance Monday that recommends but does not require that restaurants and other businesses in the suburbs further restrict in-person services to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The Cook County Department of Public Health is asking suburban bars, fitness clubs, personal care businesses and others to follow these guidelines as COVID-19 rates for people in their 20s have soared to be about 2½ times higher than they were at the end of March. That age group now has the highest rates of COVID-19, according to the department.

“We get it. It’s summer. Young people are tired of the restrictions,” Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle wrote in a statement. “But the virus is still with us. We need to get the word out and encourage young people to be patient. Physical distancing and wearing a mask is the minimum we need people to do.”

Under the guidelines, establishments that serve alcohol without a food license are asked to limit consumption to outdoor service only. The maximum party size for restaurants and bars should be curtailed to six people, whether indoors or outdoors.

Indoor fitness classes should be reduced to 10 people maximum, while any personal care businesses should discontinue services that require removing a face mask, such as facials or shaves, according to the department’s guidelines.

Similar to restrictions already enacted in Chicago, the recommendations also call for residential property managers to limit guests to six people per unit.

The recommendations came as suburban Cook County’s rolling seven-day positivity rate for COVID-19 rose from 5.2% on July 22 to 5.8% on July 31, according to the department. Hospital capacity in suburban Cook County has not been overburdened to the point of threatening surge capacities, although there have been two consecutive days of more hospital admissions. About one-third of ICU and surge beds are open in the suburbs.

Although the recommendations are only advisory, Dr. Rachel Rubin, department co-lead, said businesses must follow through or they may become mandatory.

“If we don’t remain vigilant, we will face far more restrictive mitigation efforts and we will see more disease and more death,” Rubin wrote in a statement.

Coronavirus in Illinois updates: Here's what happened on Aug. 3 with COVID-19 in the Chicago area

August 3, 2020

Cook County officials issued health guidance Monday that recommends but does not require that restaurants and other businesses in the suburbs further restrict in-person services to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

The Cook County Department of Public Health is asking suburban bars, fitness clubs, personal care businesses and others to follow these guidelines as COVID-19 rates for people in their 20s have soared to be about 2 1/2 times higher than they were at the end of March. That age group now has the highest rates of COVID-19, according to CCDPH.

"We get it. It's summer. Young people are tired of the restrictions," Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle wrote in a statement. "But the virus is still with us. We need to get the word out and encourage young people to be patient. Physical distancing and wearing a mask is the minimum we need people to do."

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Indoor fitness classes should be reduced to 10 people maximum, while any personal care businesses should discontinue services that require removing a face mask, such as facials or shaves, according to the CCDPH guidelines.

Similar to restrictions already enacted in Chicago, the recommendations also call for residential property managers to limit guests to six people per unit.



With COVID-19 On The Rise, Suburban Cook County Announces Guidance On Bars, Gyms, Home Gatherings

August 3, 2020

With coronavirus cases on the rise in suburban Cook County, the Cook County Department of Public Health has issued more restrictive guidelines when it comes to certain settings.

Those settings include bars, fitness clubs, and personal care businesses, among others.

The department noted that COVID-19 cases are on the rise in suburban Cook County – particularly among young adults in their 20s. The overall daily case count is now back where it was in March, and COVID-19 cases among those in their 20s are now about 2.5 times higher than they were at the end of March.

The age group now has the highest rates of COVID-19 in suburban Cook.

As of this past Friday, there was an eight-day increase in COVID-19 positivity rates in suburban Cook County and a two-day increase in hospital admissions. The positivity rate rose from 5.2 percent on July 22 to 5.8 percent on July 31. That is enough to require mitigation under the Restore Illinois Plan.

With that in mind, bars, taverns, breweries, and other establishments that serve alcohol, but not food, have been asked to serve customer outside only. Restaurants that serve alcohol must continue to abide by the existing rules.

The maximum party size at any restaurant or bar will be limited to six, and indoor fitness class sizes will be limited to 10.

Personal care businesses have been asked to halt services such as shaves and facials that require the removal of face masks.

Residential property managers are asked to limit guest entry to six people to prevent indoor gatherings or parties.

Meanwhile, businesses and workplaces are asked to put remote work plans in place for high-risk individuals and to support telework for as many people as possible.

Retail stores are asked to go on maintaining no more than 50 percent capacity.

The guidance applies to suburban Cook County, with the exception of Evanston, Skokie, and Oak Park. The city of Chicago reinstated similar restrictions back on Friday, July 24.



Now the suburbs eye COVID crackdowns

August 3, 2020

Suburban Cook County is following Chicago's lead to encourage bars, fitness clubs, salons and barber shops to scale back operations after a "new surge in COVID-19 cases in suburban Cook County, particularly among young adults," county officials said.

In the past 30 days, the state's Region 10, which encompasses suburban Cook County, has seen 16 days of increases in positive coronavirus tests and eight days of hospital admission increases. There have been 41,965 confirmed cases there as of Aug. 2 and 1,798 deaths.

"Chicago put in place some more restrictions about 10 days ago and now we are following suit," Cook County Department of Public Health co-lead Dr. Rachel Rubin said today. "We are especially concerned" because the county's positivity rate stands at 5.8 percent, up from 5.2 only about 10 days ago, she said.

Suburban Cook has not seen "a significant increase in hospital bed usage" or ICU admissions related to COVID, Rubin said, "so that is great."

But like Chicago, it is seeing a rise in cases among 18-to-29-year-olds. According to the county statement, rates for that age group are now about 2.5 times higher than they were at the end of March, and now have the highest rates of the virus. The county has traced outbreaks to day camps, weddings and prom parties in recent weeks, Rubin said. Deerfield, Melrose Park, Calumet City, Des Plaines and Niles are on the higher end of case rates, according to county data. See the latest city and state COVID figures in the charts below.

The county's health department is asking bars, taverns and breweries that only serve alcohol to only serve customers outdoors. Restaurants are being asked to limit table occupancy to six people. Gym classes should limit to a maximum of 10 people. Barbers and salons should halt services that require customers to remove face coverings, like shaves and facials. And residential property managers should bar more than six people from entering a residential unit.

At this point, the rollback measures are voluntary. Unlike Chicago, Cook County's Department of Public Health doesn't have partner departments to enforce. When the county finds out about a violation, they usually call a business and ask them to shape up. Rubin said businesses had generally been cooperative.

"We're still working with our legal team to determine what level of enforcement we can do," she said. "If it were legally possible for us to do so, we'd like to focus on large events and try to stop those from happening. Those are against state guidance, in any case."

Chicago officials announced today the city's Business Affairs, Buildings, Fire and Police departments had begun crackdowns of large gatherings, including a warehouse party this past weekend. Of 23 investigations, the city issued five cease and desist orders and three closure orders.



Cook County Department of Public Health Releases New Coronavirus Mitigation Guidelines

August 3, 2020

With coronavirus cases on the rise in Cook County, Board President Toni Preckwinkle and the Cook County Department of Public Health have issued new voluntary guidance for bars, fitness clubs, personal care businesses and other gathering places to help limit the spread of the virus.

According to a press release issued by the CCDPH and Preckwinkle's office, suburban Cook County's positivity rate of coronavirus cases is at 5.8%, and while that number is below the 8% threshold that the state of Illinois has set as a potential benchmark to re-introduce coronavirus restrictions, officials are still seeking to have businesses adhere to new guidelines to cut down on virus transmission.

"We get it. It's summer," Preckwinkle said. "Young people are tired of the restrictions, but the virus is still with us. We need to get the word out and encourage young people to be patient. Physical distancing and wearing a mask is the minimum we need people to do to protect themselves and their friends and family."

Dr. Rachel Rubin of the CCDPH says that the department is hoping businesses will follow the guidelines so that they "don't become requirements."

The new recommendations include:

Bars, taverns, breweries and other establishments that serve alcohol for on-site consumption without a retail food license are being asked to serve customers outdoors only.

Restaurants that serve alcohol should continue to abide by current regulations.

Maximum party size and table occupancy at restaurants, bars, taverns and breweries should be limited to six people, regardless of whether the table is indoors or outdoors.

Indoor fitness classes should be reduced to a maximum of 10 people.

Personal service businesses should discontinue services that require the removal of face coverings, including shaves and facials.

Property managers should limit guest entry to six people per unit to avoid indoor gatherings and parties.

According to the press release, suburban Cook County has seen two straight days of increased hospital admissions due to coronavirus, but remains well above the 20 percent threshold of bed availability that would trigger increased restrictions.

Despite that, officials hope that residents will take the new guidance seriously.

"If we don't remain vigilant, we will face far more restrictive mitigation efforts and we will see more disease and more death," Dr. Rubin said. "We are encouraging everyone to follow the ongoing guidelines and businesses to immediately adopt our recommendations."



Rising Number of COVID-19 Cases Prompts New Cook County Guidelines

August 3, 2020

In response to a surge in COVID-19 infections, the Cook County Department of Public Health has issued new voluntary guidance aimed at stopping the spread of the virus.

Bars, taverns, breweries and other establishments that don't have retail food licenses allowing them to serve food are being asked by health officials to only serve customers outdoors.

At restaurants, bars, taverns and breweries, groups should be limited to a maximum of six people, according to the guidance.

"We know these are settings where people tend to go and not mask and not maintain physical distancing despite efforts of management," said Dr. Rachel Rubin, CCDPH co-lead and senior medical officer. "We also know that young people tend to frequent bars and taverns in particular."

COVID-19 rates for people in their 20s are now 2.5 times higher than they were at the end of March, making them the fastest growing group for new cases, according to Rubin.

"We get it. It's summer. Young people are tired of the restrictions," Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said in a statement. "But the virus is still with us. We need to get the word out and encourage young people to be patient. Physical distancing and wearing a mask is the minimum we need people to do to protect themselves and their friends and family."

The new guidelines also state that indoor fitness classes should be capped at a maximum of 10 people, and that businesses should discontinue shaves, facials and other personal services that require the removal of masks.

Residential property managers are being asked to limit guest entry to six people per unit to avoid indoor gatherings and parties.

The new guidelines mirror those [issued by Chicago officials last month](#). "We wanted to be consistent with Chicago because really we're one big community. People live in the suburbs and socialize in the city and vice versa. So, we wanted our guidance to be consistent with that," Rubin said.

Like Chicago, suburban Cook County also issued [a quarantine order for travelers](#) last month that has since been expanded to 22 states.

Suburban Cook County has seen an increase in its positivity rate – the percentage of people tested who are positive for COVID-19. As of Friday, the positivity rate was 5.8% — up from 5.2% just 10 days ago.

There has also been an increase in hospital admissions in Cook County. As of Friday, 31% of intensive care unit beds and 36% of surge beds remained available – well above the 20% threshold that would trigger additional [restrictions per the state's mitigation plans](#).

“We are seeing increased case positivity in people getting the disease not needing (hospitalization),” Rubin said. “We don’t want to reach a point where suburban Cook County is forced to (implement) certain mitigation measures.”

While the new guidelines are strictly voluntary, the county isn’t ruling out enforcement measures in the future and is investigating what those might look like.

Despite the lack of enforcement, Rubin thinks businesses will comply. “We talked to some business associations this morning, and I think everyone wants to do the right thing and do the best they can,” Rubin said. “People in general in the community do want to keep themselves, their employees and customers safe.”



Cook County officials release new voluntary guidelines as COVID-19 cases rise

August 3, 2020

For now, the new COVID-19 guidelines in Cook County are voluntary, in part because they may be hard for the county to enforce directly, but officials are urging compliance.

At The Beacon Tap in Des Plaines word of the new guidelines was unsettling.

"Every day you wake up, and something is different. Things change, and you're trying to make the correct adaptations," said Tommy Riemer, the general manager at The Beacon Tap.

Cook County officials said suburban bars that don't serve food need to limit their service to outdoor only.

Beacon and other establishments that do serve food can still do indoor business.

Tables will be limited to six instead of ten.

"We have parties of twelve that come in, and we just put them at two separate tables, six at a table, and usually we get no pushback on it because people understand what's going on," Riemer said.

The county also limited suburban indoor fitness classes to a maximum of ten participants.

Salon services that require mask removal, including facials and shaves, also violate the guidelines. The guidelines, which mirror those in Chicago are recommendations, not requirements.

"We don't have the ability to fine, but what we do is we call them up as a start, and we give them the appropriate guidance over the phone," said Dr. Rachel Rubin, with the Cook County Department of Public Health. "We do an interview with their management, and generally speaking people have been cooperative with us up to this point."

The move came as suburban Cook County saw a test positivity rate of 5.8% up from 5.2% ten days ago- a full point higher than the test positivity rate in Chicago.

The growing number of 18 to 29-year-old testing positive for COVID-19 is driving the increase, officials said.

Officials said the rise in cases is also being driven by case clusters resulting from large gatherings, including day camps, summer parties and large weddings.

Suburban bars, restaurants asked to take voluntary steps to combat COVID-19 surge: 'In the carrot stage, not the stick'

August 3, 2020

Looking to crack down on a surge in coronavirus cases among young people in the suburbs, Cook County officials announced Monday they're urging restaurants to seat fewer diners at each table and bars to only serve customers outdoors.

Fitness centers in suburban Cook County are also being asked to reduce the number of people in the classes they hold from 50 to 10.

"We're really asking the public to really get on the bandwagon with this," said Dr. Rachel Rubin, a co-leader of the county's Department of Public Health.

"These are not major changes, I understand that it does hurt some establishments or business owners, and we certainly regret that. The important news is that we really want to stop the spread of the virus or at least slow it down."

The voluntary guidelines came as Illinois recorded another 1,298 coronavirus cases across the state on Monday, the 13th day in a row with a four-digit daily caseload.

The new infections pushed the state's seven-day positivity rate just past 4% — up sharply from 2.6% a month ago.

The situation is worse in suburban Cook County, where the 10-day positivity rate shot up to 5.8% as of last Friday.

That rising positivity rate, especially among those who are between 18 and 29, prompted the revised suburban restrictions, Rubin said.

Restaurants and bars that serve food in the county's suburbs are being asked to cap groups of diners at 6 people, down from ten.

And bars, breweries, taverns and other places that serve alcohol without a retail food license are being asked to discontinue indoor service and only serve patrons outside.

"We want everybody to be wearing a mask and social distancing and washing your hands and be careful when you go out to the bars — and just do it outside," Rubin said.

Fitness classes offered in suburban Cook County should be reduced from 50 people to 10, Rubin said.

Though the recommendations are "basically voluntary" Rubin said she hopes "most individuals will want to follow that guidance and understand why we're doing this now."

"Right now, we're sort of in the carrot stage, not the stick," Rubin said. "We really want people to get on board with this and to see that now is the time to decrease some of our openings and put mild restrictions in place for now on a voluntary basis."

One industry leader said he expects businesses to follow the guidelines to head off more drastic steps.

Restaurant and bar owners who've seen the "devastating" effect of the pandemic on their industry don't want to go backward, said Sam Toia, president of the Illinois Restaurant Association.

"We don't want to go back into shelter in place," Toia said. "We would rather take precautionary measures in small steps now than go back into shelter in place."

Daniel Clausner, the executive director of the Illinois Licensed Beverage Association, said in a statement that his organization is encouraging all members to "adhere to state and local policies."

But he urged officials to treat bars the same as restaurants.

"Bars, restaurants, taverns, and other similarly situated businesses are all tasked with enforcing the challenges of maintaining social distancing, wearing masks, sanitation procedures, etc," Clausner said. "The ILBA recommends to policymakers that all similarly situated businesses operate equally on a level playing field."

Across Illinois, the state on Monday also logged another nine deaths – four of them in Cook County — bringing the total number of those killed by the virus to 7,526. Altogether, 183,241 cases of COVID-19 have been recorded in Illinois since the pandemic gripped the state.

The state has seen a steady uptick in new cases in July, rivaling numbers not seen since May and early June.

Monday's numbers pushed the state's seven-day average positivity rate to 4.01% — the first time since early June that the rate was over 4%. Monday's single-day statewide positivity rate of 4.56% was the highest since June 6.

Over the past week, Illinois has averaged 1,512 new cases a day. The last time the state averaged that many cases over a seven-day span was at the end of the peak month of May.

The latest numbers were released about an hour after Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced a new campaign urging people to wear masks. The slogan of the series of ads that will air on television, Hulu and YouTube, is "It only works if you wear it."

The ad campaign comes as the state is seeing "some very concerning trends" in new coronavirus cases, linked to overcrowded restaurants and an overall rise among those in their late teens and early 20s.

"Folks, no one is asking you to wear a mask forever, but for the time being, until we see a very effective treatment or a vaccine, the best way to safely get to the other side of this emergency is for all of us to follow the mitigations recommended by doctors — wash your hands, watch your distance, wear a mask whenever you're out and about," the governor said in Springfield.

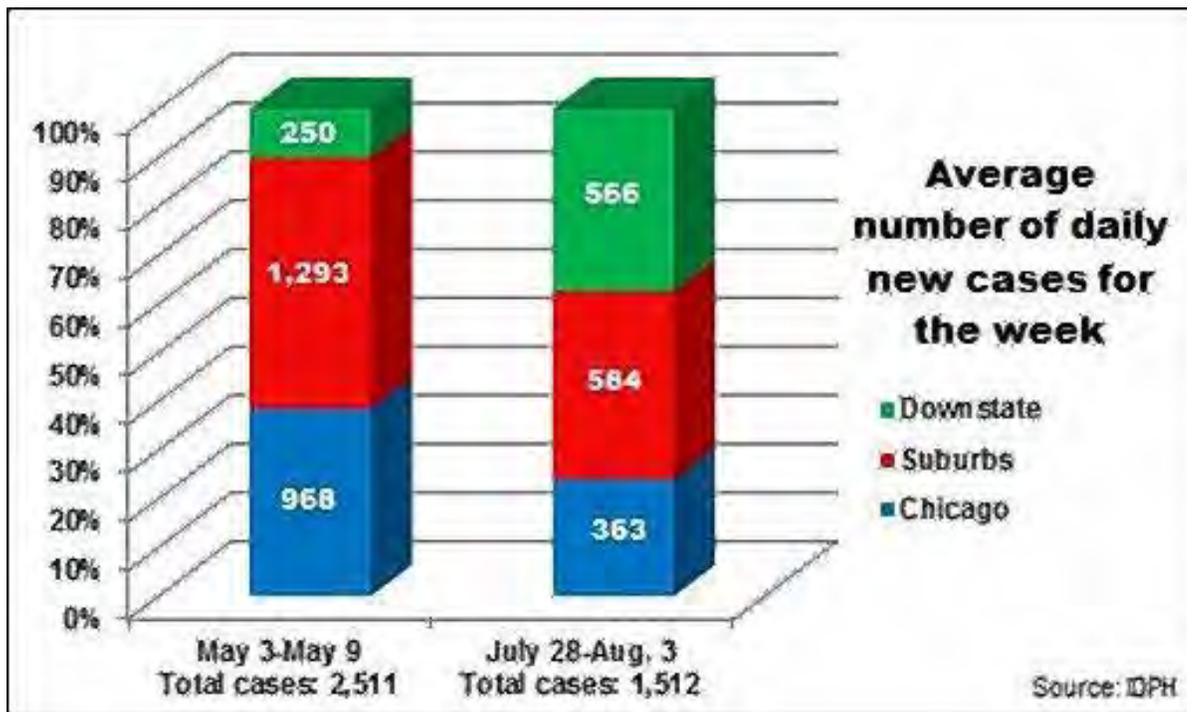
Downstate accounts for 40% of Illinois' new COVID-19 cases, up from 10% three months ago

August 3, 2020

As COVID-19 cases in Illinois peaked in early May, downstate residents made up an average of 10% of the new cases each day.

Over the past week, with cases surging once again, downstate residents account for almost 40% of the state's daily new case counts.

"Hospitals all over the state are watching and are concerned," said Danny Chun, a spokesman for the Illinois Hospital Association. "They've got surge plans in place, but would prefer not to use them. They'd prefer people wear their masks, social distance, avoid crowds and wash their hands."



With more than 800 new cases Monday, residents of the metropolitan area -- Chicago, suburban Cook County and the five collar counties -- shouldn't let down their guard. But in recent weeks, the distribution of cases around the state has shifted.

On Monday, nearly 35% of the state's 1,298 new cases were diagnosed in Illinois residents living outside the metro area, according to Illinois Department of Public Health figures. Three months ago on May 3, downstate residents made up just 9.5% of the new daily cases.

IDPH officials also reported Monday that 10 more Illinois residents had died from the respiratory disease. Six of them from the downstate counties of Adams, LaSalle, Peoria and Winnebago, and four were from Cook County.

That brings the state's death toll to 7,526 since the outbreak began, with 183,241 Illinois residents who have tested positive.

Monday's new cases come from a batch of 28,475 test results for a daily positivity rate of 4.6%, the highest single-day rate since early June.

The state's seven-day average positivity rate now stands at 4%, the highest since June 11.

The grim findings come as Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced a new \$5 million mask-wearing awareness campaign Monday.

"As much as we'd like it, this virus isn't going away on its own," Pritzker said at a morning news conference announcing the awareness campaign. "We need greater compliance if we're going to overcome this."

The campaign slogan, "It Only Works if You Wear It," will be featured via a multitude of media outlets and in multiple languages, officials said.

The \$5 million comes from federal funds intended for the states to use at their discretion to fight the spread of the virus, Pritzker said.

"A mask is no different from wearing a seat belt while driving or a helmet when riding a bike," Pritzker said. "People who refuse to wear a mask, people who enter public premises, they should be reminded again by police, and ultimately if they're refusing they're putting other people at risk and it's worthy of considering a fine at a local level."

The governor is considering asking the legislature to codify fines for mask scofflaws.

At least 11 downstate counties had exceeded multiple warning levels of increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 last week. Those areas are at risk of having business operations scaled back and public gatherings restricted.

From July 28 through Monday, the state has averaged 1,512 new cases of COVID-19 a day, according to IDPH figures. Chicago and the suburbs averaged 946 of those new cases each day while the state's 96 downstate counties averaged 566 new cases a day.

By comparison, when the state was averaging 2,511 new cases each day from May 3 to May 9, Chicago and the suburbs were responsible for 2,261 of those cases daily. Downstate counties averaged just 250 cases a day during that time.

State health officials blamed the outbreaks in downstate counties on "business operations and activities posing higher risk for disease spread, including school graduation ceremonies, a rise in cases among late teens and 20s, parties and social gatherings, people going to bars, long-term care outbreaks, clusters of cases associated with restaurants and churches, and big sports events including soccer, golf, and softball tournaments."

Meanwhile, the Cook County Public Health Department issued new guidance to businesses as new cases begin to spike in the suburban portion of the county.

Bars that don't serve food are being asked to only serve outdoors, while all eating and drinking establishments are asked to limit the size of parties to six people. Spas and barber shops should discontinue shaves and facials, the health department advised. Fitness centers should limit indoor class sizes to less than 10.

"If we don't remain vigilant, we will face far more restrictive mitigation efforts and we will see more disease and more death," said Dr. Rachel Rubin, the county health department's senior medical officer. "We are encouraging everyone to follow the ongoing guidelines and businesses to immediately adopt our recommendations, so that they don't become requirements."



New Coronavirus Restrictions For Cook County Bars, Health Clubs

August 3, 2020

New health guidance has been issued for bars, fitness clubs, personal care businesses and other gathering places, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and Cook County Department of Public health announced Monday.

The guidance is in response to a new surge of coronavirus cases in suburban Cook County, particularly among young adults.

The new guidance measures include:

Bars, taverns, breweries and other establishments that serve alcohol for on-site consumption without a retail food license are being asked to serve customers outdoors only.

Restaurants that serve alcohol need to continue to abide by ongoing health guidance and existing regulations.

Maximum party size and table occupancy at restaurants, bars, taverns, and breweries should be reduced to six people (indoor or outdoor).

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

Personal service businesses should discontinue services (shaves, facials) that require the removal of face coverings.

Residential property managers should limit guest entry to six people per unit to avoid indoor gatherings and parties.

In addition, businesses and workplaces should:

Institute remote work for high-risk individuals and continue to support telework for as many workers as possible.

Retail establishments should maintain no more than 50 percent capacity, which is the current recommendation.

According to a release, the positivity rate is approaching one of the two threshold measures – a sustained increase in the 7-day rolling average in the positivity rate - in the state's Restore Illinois Mitigation Plan. The positivity rate is a measure of the percentage of people that test positive for COVID-19, averaged over 10 days. On July 31, the positivity rate was 5.8 percent in suburban Cook County, up from 5.2 percent July 22.

Rates of coronavirus cases for people in their 20s are now about 2.5 times higher than they were at the end of March, and this age group now has the highest rates of COVID-19.

"We get it. It's summer. Young people are tired of the restrictions," Preckwinkle said in a release. "But the virus is still with us. We need to get the word out and encourage young people to be patient. Physical distancing and wearing a mask is the minimum we need people to do to protect themselves and their friends and family."

Suburban Cook County has not seen a reduction in hospital capacity that would immediately threaten surge capabilities – the second threshold measure - but there have been two consecutive days of increased hospital admissions, a release

states. As of July 31, 31 percent of ICU beds and 36 percent of surge beds remain available, above the 20 percent threshold.

"If we don't remain vigilant, we will face far more restrictive mitigation efforts, and we will see more disease and more death. We are encouraging everyone to follow the ongoing guidelines and businesses to immediately adopt our recommendations, so that they don't become requirements," said Dr. Rachel Rubin, Cook County Department of Public Health Co-Lead and Senior Medical Officer.



Cook County COVID-19 announcement of stricter guidelines delayed to next week

July 31, 2020

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But the guidelines were not released Friday; instead, health officials pushed them back to next week.

"I apologize for the delay, but we really want to be very deliberate about this and there's some other considerations we need to put in place before we put out the final wording," said Dr. Rachel Rubin, co-lead of the Cook County Department of Public Health.

Dr. Rubin said right now young people seem to be driving COVID-19 cases up throughout the country.

"It's summertime, people are out. Young adults and adolescents are out congregating and that's beginning to show. Our hospital rates are not increasing, probably, because they young people tend to have milder disease," she said.

Cook County is identified as Region 10 on the Illinois Department of Public Health's website that tracks COVID-19 metrics, stretching from Glencoe and Northbrook up north, all the way south to Richton Park and Chicago Heights.

Unlike Chicago, the county's health department can only give guidance, not direction, because there are 127 municipalities, 140 school districts and four more health departments in Evanston, Skokie, Oak Park and Stickney.

"The challenge for Cook County is we don't have enforcement powers, so what we can do is suggest guidelines to people to protect their health, not only the health of their family and their neighbors, their friends and the larger community," Preckwinkle said.

As of Thursday, positivity rates continued to climb in Region 10, triggering concern and guidelines that are expected to go into effect this weekend.

Cook County health officials will only say the stricter guidelines will be similar to Chicago, where there have been more restrictions on bars, restaurants and fitness centers.

"It would be fair to say that I think we're looking at some of those, some of those same kinds of measures," said Demian Christiansen, Cook County's director of communicable disease control and prevention. "We obviously don't want it to get out of control, like we've seen in some other areas. We definitely want to put a lid on as much of this as possible."

As of Thursday, Cook County's positivity rate is 5.6%, and had increased for nine days straight. Hospital admissions have increased for four days straight, as well. If hospital admissions continue to rise the next three days, it could trigger state

action.

"Cook County and the city of Chicago both have a serious problem," Gov. JB Pritzker said. "I mean, look, every region has increasing positivity rates and increasing cases. This is hugely problematic. It's not something we wanted to see happen, but it means we're going to have to take a hard look at what we need to do, what mitigations we need now in order to get us back in line in the direction where we were going, which was reducing those positivity rates."

Hang-ups, lies and wrong numbers: Contact tracers' uphill fight against COVID-19

July 31, 2020

A woman in Little Village sobs after learning she is the latest member of her family to test positive for COVID-19. She fears she won't be able to take care of her grandson.

A worker at a West Side food-processing company explains how no precautions are taken to protect employees who are herded into a small room to punch timecards.

A young woman is frustrated that the customers at her small Lake County store won't social distance or wear masks.

These are stories told to contact tracers, the people who investigate interactions between those infected with COVID-19 and their family, friends or anyone else potentially exposed to the virus. The aim: to identify and isolate infected people before they spread the virus.

Hundreds of millions of dollars of federal money is being funneled to health departments across Illinois, including those in Chicago and Cook County, to hire hundreds of contact tracers. The state says robust contact tracing of at least 90% of reported cases within 24 hours of a diagnosis is necessary to be able to safely reopen. But officials admit that's not happening in suburban Cook County, for example. And it's not clear which local health departments are meeting that goal.

Months into the pandemic, the state is still "in the middle of" compiling data on the extent of local efforts, a spokeswoman for Gov. J.B. Pritzker's health department said. State health officials now say the contact tracing goal was a guideline rather than a requirement for communities to partially reopen this past spring.

Large-scale tracing efforts are only just getting started in Illinois. Chicago and Cook County-backed programs have yet to even make their first hires.

These efforts now will begin as an uptick in cases makes it difficult to keep up and as widespread testing with timely results — essential to identifying who needs to be traced — remains inaccessible to many.

How Illinois' efforts compare to other states is hard to gauge. Cities including New York and Houston have experienced missteps and uneven success — pointing to another serious shortfall in the nation's patchwork approach to fighting the virus.

"Unfortunately, due to our overall disjointed pandemic response, there is no nationalized or centralized means of contact tracing," said Dr. Aniruddha Hazra, an infectious diseases researcher and assistant professor of medicine at the University of Chicago.

'Calls can be intense'

Every contact of an infected person provides a clue to the virus' spread and can save lives. But it's not an easy task to trace them, according to those attempting to do it in Illinois. The workers have the unenviable job, for instance, of telling people they could be infected, news that sometimes met with distrust or hostility. And that's if the contacts can even be reached.

"Some of our calls can be very intense," said Erik Garcia, who trains and supervises contact tracers and also makes calls for Howard Brown Health. "I've had patients crying on the phone."

That was the case with a Latina woman in Little Village who lived with multiple family members infected with the virus. After testing positive, she cried while on the phone with Garcia and worried aloud that she wouldn't be able to care for her grandson. Garcia referred the woman to social service workers to help the family with groceries.

In another case, Garcia was told employees of a food-processing company were being crowded into small spaces. The information pointed to a potential source for the virus' spread. At the request of an infected worker who feared retaliation, Garcia didn't contact the company directly, instead providing the employee with a number for a federal hotline to report unsafe working conditions.

Howard Brown, which has decades of experience with contact tracing HIV and sexually transmitted infections, has been tracking COVID patients in Chicago since March. Despite the Chicago health center's efforts, Garcia said some people refuse to get tested or to isolate.

"People are telling [tracers] they don't want to get tested. 'I'll get rid of it. I'm young,'" Garcia said.

In May, the Lake County Health Department was selected for one of two pilot projects backed by the state to expand its tracking program and try software to be used by contact tracers across Illinois. The county is receiving \$4.9 million to hire more tracers, a job that largely has been done so far by existing health department workers and volunteers in a county that recorded almost 12,000 cases of the coronavirus.

Many unwilling to talk

Derick Bonewitz, a Libertyville resident and retired Abbott Laboratories scientist, began volunteering for Lake County in April. His goal: to speak with eight people a day. Lake health officials say tracers have been able to reach about three-quarters of the reported infected people over the last few weeks.

At first, Bonewitz talked with a number of people who appeared to be getting infected at their workplaces. In recent weeks, that's changed as Illinois and other states began reopening.

"Since then, a lot of what I'm handling seems to be shifting, going toward more social gatherings," he said. "People who travel to a college town or travel to a vacation site. The Fourth of July weekend seemed to be particularly active."

Not everyone is willing to talk, Bonewitz said. A woman afraid of losing her job or taking heat from her boss refused to give any information and hung up, he said.

In another case, a young woman who "was quite sick" appeared to have been infected at a small store where she was a manager.

"She was concerned so many people had been coming in to the store and not observing requirements to wear masks or practice social distancing," Bonewitz said. "Now, her family is sick. She's sick. She's frustrated with how this is going on in the community."

The limits of tracing

Contact tracing has been a public health strategy for over a century and was used during the 1918 flu pandemic. But its effectiveness has limits. And the practice must be done in connection with widespread testing with quick results and paired with multiple safeguards including social distancing and the wearing of face masks, experts say.

"You cannot separate testing from contact tracing," said Dr. Howard Ehrman, an assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago and former assistant commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health. "We could've saved hundreds of lives in this city, particularly African American and Latino lives, if we would've set up testing correctly. People know how to do this. This is not difficult to do."

Cook County and city of Chicago officials said they are attempting to address racial disparities by recruiting contact tracers in neighborhoods with a heavy concentration of outbreaks.

“We want to be able to resource people that come from the communities that have been most affected by the pandemic,” said Dr. Rachel Rubin, senior medical officer for the Cook County Department of Public Health. “So that means mostly our Black and Brown communities, our impoverished communities.”

Not close to 90%

Cook County received \$41 million in federal funding to hire 400 new county employees to support tracing efforts. The county has been doing limited contact tracing, with existing staff focusing on outbreaks at 178 congregate settings such as nursing homes and almost 70 other settings, including workplaces, Rubin said. The county traced around 6,600 cases of the more than 40,000 reported suburban cases it tracks.

“We are still ramping up,” Rubin said. “We are not close to meeting the 90% metric for cases contacted 24 hours after being diagnosed.”

The city is about to put most of its contact tracing program in the hands of a workforce development group, awarding \$56 million to Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership. The group is partnering with several private organizations and at least 30 community groups to hire 600 contact tracers in addition to 200 the city already has.

The city says it tries to open investigations into every infected person within a day of a reported infection. But that doesn’t mean anyone is contacted. One day in late July, city tracers reached only about 40% of their contacts. About 15% of all reported cases include incorrect or incomplete phone numbers, said Dr. Jennifer Layden, chief medical officer for the city’s public health department.

“There are often challenges we face when we initiate contact,” Layden said. “It’s a long process that takes complicated investigation.”

Even after tracers are hired, tracing will be ineffective if test results in many cases continue to take a week or more to come back, said Dr. Ronald Hershov, associate professor of epidemiology at UIC School of Public Health.

“You have to get to them in 72 hours,” said Hershov, citing research published in [The Lancet](#). “Your contact tracing is toast if you have to wait seven days.”

With recent daily case counts of the coronavirus well over 1,000 statewide, the numbers are going to be difficult to manage without stronger mitigation efforts, said Dr. Robert Murphy, executive director of the Institute for Global Health at Northwestern University.

“Contact tracing is good, but it’s only part of the program,” Murphy said. “Once you get the numbers down, contact tracing is great.”

Chicago Hospital CEOs Outline COVID-19's Financial Toll

July 31, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic will have a long-lasting impact on the hospital industry, a trio of Chicago-area CEOs said Thursday.



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HYDE PARK HERALD

Lowry votes for 'Justice for Black Lives' resolution to cut spending on policing, incarceration

July 30, 2020

County Commissioner Bill Lowry (D-3rd) and 14 of his colleagues voted in favor of an aspirational resolution, "Justice for Black Lives," that would reallocate funds from policing and incarceration towards public services not administered by law enforcement.

The resolution, which was approved on July 30, specifies reallocation towards services throughout the county, "but especially in Black and Brown communities most impacted by violence and incarceration."

It calls upon the board to invest resources in housing, health care and mental health, restorative justice, transit and jobs, including increasing opportunities available to minority- and women-owned business enterprise (MBE/WBE).

"We don't make law here, but we do breathe life into laws that reach us either from Washington or from Springfield. We do so by ordinance, and we do so by resolution," Lowry said at Wednesday's meeting. "This resolution touches my truth, and my truth is Black lives matter."

In an interview, Lowry called the resolution a vision statement and the present a time "to seize this moment of collective consciousness to right the wrongs not of the last four years, not the last 40 years, but of the last 400 years." He connected his ongoing work as an elected official to the resolution's goals.

The county government is responsible for the [Cook County Health](#) (CCH) system, courts and the jail; it runs the second-largest property tax system in the country and sets the budget for the sheriff, which [reported](#) \$608 million in expenditures in the current fiscal year.

Board President Toni Preckwinkle, however, [has said](#) that the 2021 budget shortfall may reach \$410 million next year, having already reached \$280 million this year. Lowry said the county would do its best to avoid layoffs among government employees, though he conceded that the situation does not look good and is not getting better.

"We're looking at a situation where the projections of deficit for 2021 are vast, so I cannot sit here and say to you that we've identified where \$25 million is going to come from," he said, hypothesizing an amount that could be transferred to social services. "I can say to you that that is not the amount being sought to seed the programming."

Facing severe financial headwinds as they exist, Lowry suggested that economic empowerment will be the ultimate salve for police brutality, structural racism and neighborhood violence. He pointed to his Good Faith Effort Transparency Report Ordinance, which passed last year, that requires county contractors who seek waivers from MBE/WBE participation to explain their rationales.

"That level of transparency tells us two things: if there is truly a contract where an individual is not able to find an MBE or WBE to partner with, that creates an opportunity for us to fill that void," he said. "But on the other hand, what I believe we see is fewer situations where waivers are being requested, and that's exactly what's happened."

And amid a public health crisis, Lowry suggested that work continue on the planned reconstruction of [Provident Hospital](#), replacing the facility at 500 E. 51st St.

The Tribune reported that the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board [approved CCH's plan](#) to build a new \$240 million hospital, but the plans [went on ice](#) in February, even before the pandemic erupted locally, amid the brouhaha over the firing of the hospital system's CEO. Though CCH faces a gigantic shortfall after federal assistance runs out, Lowry said officials project an opening in late 2022 or early 2023.

Buttressing Provident, one of two public hospitals in Chicago, should be prioritized, he argued, as CCH provides 60% of the charity care to Cook County residents.

"That continues to be our charge," Lowry said. "We're very cognizant of it, and we're doing everything in our power to make sure that those individuals who otherwise would have no health care have health care, and charity care is one of the ways that we can do it."



Cook County Updates Emergency Travel Guidance to Include 22 States

July 28, 2020

The Cook County Department of Public Health's emergency travel guidance now directs travelers from 22 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 22 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 taking effect in the city Friday. The county's list, updated every Tuesday, included four more states this week: Wisconsin, North Dakota, Nebraska and Missouri.

- Florida
- Louisiana
- Mississippi
- Arizona
- Alabama
- Georgia
- Tennessee
- Nevada
- South Carolina
- Oklahoma
- Texas
- Idaho
- Arkansas
- California
- Missouri
- North Carolina
- Utah
- Wisconsin
- North Dakota
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Nebraska

“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 when the guidance was first launched. “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. It was [updated this week](#) to also include Wisconsin, North Dakota, Nebraska and Missouri.

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



Expert Says Safety Is Up To Everyone When It Comes To Colleges Resuming Classes

July 28, 2020

As many get ready to send their children back to college campuses this fall, a local health expert said making sure the resumption is done safely is up to everyone: colleges, students, and parents.

Many colleges are relying on CDC guidelines.

“Everything revolves around the safe practices of masking and social distancing,” said Dr. Nimmi Rajagopal, Associate Chair of Family and Community Medicine with Cook County Health. “You really have to assess the space.”

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“Everything revolves around the safe practices of masking and social distancing,” said Dr. Nimmi Rajagopal, Associate Chair of Family and Community Medicine with Cook County Health. “You really have to assess the space.”



College students, faculty grapple with campus COVID-19 concerns ahead of fall semester

July 28, 2020

Until a vaccine arrives many college students, as well as some faculty and staff, are concerned for safety once classes resume this fall.

Nearly 7,000 students from Chicago's downtown Columbia College campus wait in angst as they await the upcoming semester.

"About 50% of the courses are currently being offered with some in-person instruction and that's too many," said Diana Vallera, with the Columbia College Chicago Faculty Union. "Many of our courses we know are best-served face to face but they're going to be impossible in some instances to do them safely."

The safety of in-person learning on college campuses is being questioned by faculty, not just across the state but also the country, especially as young people are now the biggest drivers of new COVID-19 cases.

At Illinois State University, where a large number of students come from the western suburbs, there are serious concerns regarding community spread. Faculty there have pushed back, and now many will be allowed to opt-out from in-person teaching.

"I have health conditions that prevent me from putting myself in a position where I could catch this," said ISU professor Stacey Otto. "We know students will be students, particularly when alcohol was involved. We were all students ourselves. So we want to protect from that impending disaster."

With little ability to socially distance within a dorm situation, Loyola University has decided those returning to campus will have their own rooms. They will also be required to wear masks, as well as submit to frequent testing and contact tracing.

Cook County Health Doctor Nimmi Rajagopal believes institutions and parents will play an important role in drilling in the importance of responsible behavior.

"The battle for every student is that they enjoy their freedom, but they also want to be respected as adults, so it's really trying to help them understand what's at risk," Rajagopal said. "We all know, if there's no accountability, there is no ability to give them the framework to be successful."

Even as colleges and universities continue to revise their plans, the consensus seems to be that priority must be given to those courses that absolutely require in-person teaching, with almost everything else remaining online for the fall semester.

Parents decide how to educate children as returning to school becomes a concern amid the pandemic

July 27, 2020

Joshua Claybourn is leaning toward sending his kindergarten daughter to in-person classes at a private school next month. Holly Davis' sixth-grade daughter will learn online, though the family has not yet decided what to do for school for a teenage daughter who requires special accommodations for hearing problems and dyslexia and another who's starting college.

As they decide how their children will learn this fall amid the **coronavirus pandemic**, parents are anxiously weighing the benefits of in-person instruction against the risks that schools could shut their doors again or that their children could contract the virus and pass it on.

"To say we are stressed might be an understatement," said Davis, of Zionsville, Indiana, whose family is self-isolating after one of their daughters was exposed to COVID-19 at a cross country meet. "We're being forced to make impossible decisions."

Across the country, chaos and disarray have marked the start of the school year as families await directives from district officials and, where they have a choice, make agonising decisions over whether to enroll their children online or in person - often with very little guidance.

If their kids are not in classrooms, parents will have to line up child care - or find the time to help them learn online. They have no idea if it will be safe to send their children to school - or whether the school doors will open at all or stay open if someone is diagnosed with the virus.

Further complicating decisions, in some public school districts, kids who opt for online instruction won't be able to participate in in-person extracurricular activities.

The decision over how kids will be schooled is particularly fraught in low-income areas and communities of colour that bear the double burden of being places both most affected by the pandemic and ones where students could benefit most from being in school, said Dr. Kiran Joshi, senior medical officer and co-lead of **the Cook County Health Department**, which serves 2.4 million people around Chicago.

"I think there's clearly a lot of value in in-person instruction," Joshi said. "I think, though, that that has to be balanced with the need to control the pandemic."

Many parents dread a return to what millions faced this spring, when they tried to work while their kids attended online school.

About 70% of Americans think schools should open in the fall, though most of those think it should happen with restrictions, according to a recent poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs. Only 8% say K-12 schools should operate normally. Mask wearing has been a particular sticking point in many places. In Springfield, Illinois, scores of people rallied against a requirement that schoolchildren wear face coverings while attending class.

Claybourn, father to the kindergartner, is weighing his options. He said it's not clear yet what his local public school system in Newburgh, Indiana, would do if a someone caught COVID-19. The private school he's eyeing said it would close only the child's classroom, and only for two to three weeks.

The public school also plans to offer an online option, but to Claybourn, an attorney who works outside of his home, "that is not a solution because ultimately requires someone with the kids all day."

He also wants his daughter to have the routine, friendships and interactions with teachers that come with in-school learning.

"I will never be as good of a teacher as the trained professionals," he said. "I understand the concern about kids contracting and spreading the virus, but for me the larger concern is the prospect of not being in school for an extended period."

Many parents dread a return to what millions faced when the pandemic broke, when they tried to work while their kids attended online school.

For Davis and her husband, health concerns and the threat that schools could close at a moment's notice pushed them to choose **online learning** for their youngest daughter, rather than a hybrid program that would include some in-person learning.

Davis explained that she is at high risk for developing serious illness if she gets infected.

"Until they figure out what's going on (with the virus), let's take one kid out of the system," she said.

A resurgence of **coronavirus infections** in much of the United States is adding to the uncertainty.

The U.S. leads the world with more than 4.1 million confirmed infections and over 146,000 deaths, according to data compiled by **Johns Hopkins University**. Worldwide, more than 15.7 million infections and over 640,000 deaths have been reported.

Experts say those figures understate the true toll of the pandemic, due in part to limited testing.

Many countries are seeing rising case tolls. France's **coronavirus** infection rate crept higher Saturday, and Spain cracked down on nightlife, trying to tamp down on new infection clusters.

India, which has the world's third-highest infections behind the United States and Brazil, saw a surge of more than 49,000 new cases, raising its total to over 1.3 million.

In New York City, Macho Lara, an IT manager at a Brooklyn charter school, said he and his wife have agonized over what to do with their children, who are entering third grade and fifth grade.

Officials are tentatively offering the public school system's 1.1 million students the choice between continuing remote instruction or a hybrid model.

"We still have no idea what's going to happen in the fall," said Lara, who said they're trying to weigh health risks, the uncertainty of their work schedules, local transmission rates, their children's need for friends and the impact on the social development of their 8-year-old.

Complicating the family's decision, they're getting little clarity from elected leaders. Mayor Bill de Blasio said this week he wouldn't make a final decision on opening schools until just a few days before they are scheduled to restart in September. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has said the ultimate decision is up to him.

President Donald Trump had initially demanded a full reopening of the nation's schools, but has more recently acknowledged that some may need to delay their reopening this fall.

For Lara, there is no good choice.

"They're both going to hurt," he said. "It's which is going to suck a little bit less."

Take basic precautions to prevent West Nile virus while enjoying the summer weather

July 27, 2020

Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) officials would like to remind residents to be cautious and protect against West Nile virus during the summer months. Prevention is the most effective way to protect yourself and your family from becoming infected with West Nile virus.

"We find West Nile virus in our communities every year," said Dr. Rachel Rubin, CCDPH co-lead and senior medical officer. "For some who become infected, it can be very debilitating. There are basic things we can do to 'Fight the Bite' and prevent mosquitoes from breeding or biting."

West Nile virus is an infection carried by the Culex mosquito, which breeds in small pools of stagnant water. They rest during the day in areas of vegetation but they are most active and likely to bite between the hours of dusk and dawn. The most effective way to prevent West Nile virus is to practice the 3 R's:

- * Remove standing water around your home.

Get rid of standing water in pet bowls, flower pot saucers, old tires, bird baths, baby pools and toys where mosquitoes can breed.

Make sure rain gutters drain properly.

- * Repel mosquitoes when outdoors by applying insect repellent with DEET and follow label directions.

- * Repair or replace torn screens on doors and windows.

Most human cases occur in the late summer and early fall. Four out of five people infected with West Nile virus will not show any symptoms. But illness can occur 3-15 days after an infected mosquito bite and cause symptoms of fever, headache and body aches. People over the age of 50 and those with chronic diseases such as heart disease or cancer may be more at-risk for serious complications from encephalitis or meningitis. For that reason, people who experience high fever, confusion, muscle weakness, severe headaches, or a stiff neck should see a doctor immediately.

CCDPH conducts surveillance between May and October each year to identify mosquitoes, birds and humans positive for West Nile virus. For the latest information on where West Nile virus is circulating and to report dead birds, please visit www.fightthebitecookcounty.com, and follow the Cook County Department of Public Health on social media at www.facebook.com/CCDPH and www.twitter/cookcohealth.

Amid virus, uncertainty, parents decide how to school kids

July 26, 2020

Joshua Claybourn is leaning toward sending his kindergarten daughter to in-person classes at a private school next month. Holly Davis' sixth-grade daughter will learn online, though the family has not yet decided what to do for school for a teenage daughter who requires special accommodations for hearing problems and dyslexia and another who's starting college.

As they decide how their children will learn this fall amid the coronavirus pandemic, parents are anxiously weighing the benefits of in-person instruction against the risks that schools could shut their doors again or that their children could contract the virus and pass it on.

"To say we are stressed might be an understatement," said Davis, of Zionsville, Indiana, whose family is self-isolating after one of their daughters was exposed to COVID-19 at a cross country meet. "We're being forced to make impossible decisions."

Across the country, chaos and disarray have marked the start of the school year as families await directives from district officials and, where they have a choice, make agonizing decisions over whether to enroll their children online or in person — often with very little guidance.

If their kids are not in classrooms, parents will have to line up child care — or find the time to help them learn online. They have no idea if it will be safe to send their children to school — or whether the school doors will open at all or stay open if someone is diagnosed with the virus.

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The public school also plans to offer an online option, but to Claybourn, an attorney who works outside of his home, “that is not a solution because ultimately requires someone with the kids all day.”

He also wants his daughter to have the routine, friendships and interactions with teachers that come with in-school learning.

“I will never be as good of a teacher as the trained professionals,” he said. “I understand the concern about kids contracting and spreading the virus, but for me the larger concern is the prospect of not being in school for an extended period.”

For Davis and her husband, health concerns and the threat that schools could close at a moment’s notice pushed them to choose online learning for their youngest daughter, rather than a hybrid program that would include some in-person learning.

Davis explained that she is at high risk for developing serious illness if she gets infected.

“Until they figure out what’s going on (with the virus), let’s take one kid out of the system,” she said.

A resurgence of coronavirus infections in much of the United States is adding to the uncertainty.

The U.S. leads the world with more than 4.1 million confirmed infections and over 146,000 deaths, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. Worldwide, more than 15.7 million infections and over 640,000 deaths have been reported.

Experts say those figures understate the true toll of the pandemic, due in part to limited testing.

Many countries are seeing rising case tolls. France’s coronavirus infection rate crept higher Saturday, and Spain cracked down on nightlife, trying to tamp down on new infection clusters.

India, which has the world’s third-highest infections behind the United States and Brazil, saw a surge of more than 49,000 new cases, raising its total to over 1.3 million.

In New York City, Macho Lara, an IT manager at a Brooklyn charter school, said he and his wife have agonized over what to do with their children, who are entering third grade and fifth grade.

Officials are tentatively offering the public school system’s 1.1 million students the choice between continuing remote instruction or a hybrid model.

“We still have no idea what’s going to happen in the fall,” said Lara, who said they’re trying to weigh health risks, the uncertainty of their work schedules, local transmission rates, their children’s need for friends and the impact on the social development of their 8-year-old.

Complicating the family’s decision, they’re getting little clarity from elected leaders. Mayor Bill de Blasio said this week he wouldn’t make a final decision on opening schools until just a few days before they are scheduled to restart in September. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has said the ultimate decision is up to him.

President Donald Trump had initially demanded a full reopening of the nation’s schools, but has more recently acknowledged that some may need to delay their reopening this fall.

For Lara, there is no good choice.

“They’re both going to hurt,” he said. “It’s which is going to suck a little bit less.”

Modern Healthcare

CountyCare CEO resigns

July 25, 2020

The chief executive of Cook County Health's Medicaid managed care plan is stepping down next month.

James Kiamos is leaving CountyCare after more than two years at the helm, CCH confirmed.

"Jim has been instrumental in the growth and success of CountyCare since joining us in 2018," Cook County Health CEO Debra Carey wrote in a letter to county commissioners yesterday. "Please join me in thanking Jim for his commitment to our health plan members and to the mission of Cook County Health. We wish him the best in his future endeavors."

Carey is working on a transition plan and will announce interim leadership "as soon as possible." Kiamos' last day is Aug. 21. He did not respond to a request for comment. A CCH spokeswoman says he left voluntarily. His exit follows that of CCH CEO John Jay Shannon in November, and CFO Ekerete Akpan in February. Health officials told commissioners they expect to announce potential new CEOs within the coming weeks, according to the Sun-Times.

CountyCare serves roughly 330,000 members, or 15 percent of Medicaid beneficiaries in the state. It's one of five private health insurers (not including NextLevel Health, which is closing) administering Medicaid benefits in Illinois and the only plan that operates solely in Cook County.

Prior to joining CountyCare, Kiamos led Family Health Network. The now-defunct insurance company exited the market in 2017 when the state's managed care program was relaunched with seven (now five) insurers, down from 12. Family Health Network's 220,000 members moved into other plans, including CountyCare.

Under Illinois' Medicaid managed care program, the state pays CountyCare and other insurers a set amount per patient, rather than paying for each medical service provided. The goal is to improve people's health and control costs by ensuring all care is appropriate and high-quality.

But the program is not without criticism. Health care providers—especially safety-net hospitals that treat large numbers of low-income patients—say claim denials and late payments from insurers threaten their operations.

A pattern of late payments from CountyCare caught the attention of the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services—which funds a portion of the joint federal and state health insurance program—earlier this year. The plan has since submitted a corrective action plan to the agency and, as of June 7, it had about \$175 million in unpaid claims—down from about \$350 million on Feb. 9.



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How six months of pandemic have changed Illinois forever

July 24, 2020

Firsthand accounts from the front lines reveal the lasting impact.

Since Illinois reported its first case of the novel coronavirus on Jan. 24, COVID-19 has cut through every aspect of life—from the most basic social interactions to education, health care and travel.

In a span of six months, 168,000 Illinoisans have tested positive for the virus and more than 7,300 have died. Roughly 1.5 million people have applied for unemployment benefits in Illinois since March, employers' costs have skyrocketed as they implement new safety measures and governments statewide face steep budget gaps and rising calls for relief. More than 4,000 Chicago-area businesses shut down as stay-home restrictions and fear of infection kept customers out of restaurants and stores. Meanwhile, as case rates rise in other states, leaders are bracing for a new surge.

But in the midst of the gravest public health crisis in generations, people are adapting to a new way of life, full of e-learning, mask wearing and socially distant celebrations. Whether the pandemic will lead to permanent work flexibility, bigger investments in public health and unemployment, or meaningful moves toward equity is still unknown.

But how did we get here? Crain's asked Chicago-area decision-makers, business leaders and workers how the first six months of the pandemic in Illinois—from the controversial calls to the most pivotal moments—have affected them and what life is going to look like in the future as a result. Here's what they said. (Interviews have been edited for length and clarity.)



Gov. J.B. Pritzker reflects on the early days of the pandemic



Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle discusses the moment she realized the historic significance of COVID-19

Dr. Sharon Welbel, infectious disease chair, Cook County Health



Dr. Sharon Welbel reflects on the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

March was a whirlwind

The case count rose from 11 to 585 between March 9, when Gov. J.B. Pritzker issued his disaster declaration, and March 20, when he issued the stay-at-home order. Life changed drastically for Illinoisans as businesses shifted or shuttered operations and government officials worked to ramp up testing capabilities.



Anne Caprara, governor's chief of staff

Researchers at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana sent us a PowerPoint deck. The slide that haunted me and the governor looked at deaths in Chicago—6,000-plus more people would die without mitigation efforts. He ripped the piece of paper out, the one page that had the numbers on it, and it's still on his desk. I know he looks at it literally every day.



Sam Toia, CEO, Illinois Restaurant Association

When we first wanted to close restaurants down March 17, we were thinking we would be up and running again by May 1. We never, ever thought we'd miss Easter, we'd miss Mother's Day, Cinco de Mayo, Father's Day, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July.



Toni Preckwinkle, Cook County Board president

Two of my staff members have tested positive. One at the end of March, and he was sick for two months. And another of my staff members was asymptomatic, but both of them tested positive. At the very beginning I said, "You know, we're all going to know people who are sick. We're all going to know people who succumb to the disease."

Building the plane while flying it

State and local officials had to respond quickly to the growing pandemic, from increasing testing and hospital capacity to acquiring personal protective equipment and ventilators. McCormick Place was transformed into an "alternate care facility," and recently shuttered hospitals, including MetroSouth Medical Center in Blue Island, were getting ready to reopen in the case of a patient surge. There were Wild West missions: chartered FedEx flights bearing PPE and frenzied drives to deliver state checks to suppliers. At the same time, essential businesses had to adapt to keep workers safe while others were forced to close.



J.B. Pritzker, governor of Illinois

I would sit down with people and say, "OK, now that I understand what we need to do, how long will it take us to go from here to the next step?" And someone would say, "That'll take six weeks." Six weeks? That's like six years. People are dying. And I would say, "You have two weeks."



Dr. John Jay Shannon, medical consultant, Illinois Emergency Management Agency

Early on, one of the questions I was asked was, "Well, how many ventilators do we need?" It's pretty ridiculous when you find yourself guesstimating with an order of magnitude between the estimates. Three thousand ventilators is different than 30,000 ventilators.



Caprara

We had to buy the supplies, then literally figure out how to get a plane from China to the U.S. And in the middle of all of that, we were hearing stories out of Maryland and Massachusetts where equipment was getting confiscated. I said to the governor, "I'm going to O'Hare. I'm taking the National Guard and the State Police, and we're going to go. And he was like, "OK, what are you going to do if federal authorities show up?" I said, "Probably get arrested, in which case you'll have to get me out of jail."



Pritzker

We looked at everything. We looked at, should we buy a testing facility? The state of Illinois, buying a testing facility and operating it. I had talked to the governor of Minnesota, and he had been talking to Mayo Clinic about buying a laboratory from them.



Rob Karr, CEO, Illinois Retail Merchants Association

There was an irrational run on toilet paper, and then it became cleaning products. Working with state and national transportation departments, we got worker trucker hours suspended so they could drive as much as they want. We got weight limits increased 10 percent to 88,000 pounds. We were able to get 15 percent more products from the manufacturer's door to the grocery store.



Mark Denzler, CEO, Illinois Manufacturers' Association

AbbVie started making these testing reagents on one of their lines. They initially started making 2,000 a week, then it was 5,000 a week. You had Abbott make the rapid test. At Richards-Wilcox, they were getting ready to shut down because no one's buying metal shelving units. They flipped in a couple days and made emergency hospital beds. Diageo started making sanitizer; a lot of liquor manufacturers did that. Pioneer Services out in the suburbs shut down profitable lines to make parts for ventilators.



Scott Weiner, founder, Fifty/50 Restaurant Group

My mentality when I knew things were going to get shut down was to do whatever we needed to do just to protect the money that was in the bank, as well as to keep as many people as I could employed while making sure that the other 75 percent that I had to furlough would have a job to come back to. It was about 600 people that we had employed in January, February. Nobody had any idea if we were going to get Paycheck Protection Program money.



Jose Sanchez, CEO, Norwegian American Hospital:

Alternate care sites were opened with the best intentions, however, in practice, they did not meet the intended outcomes. For example, McCormick Place, if the patient had a certain level of acuity or needed oxygen, or the patient was homeless, they wouldn't take them. Now they're trying to open MetroSouth. I hope that we don't make the same mistakes.



Pritzker

Should we have done McCormick Place differently? Look, we were preparing for the worst. Look what happened in New York. Look what happened in Detroit. These things became necessary. There was little information about how fast this would overtake a city or a state. I always said that the best outcome was to not need these things..

A tale of two cities

Racial disparities in COVID's toll began to emerge within the first weeks of the virus gaining a foothold here. In early April, roughly 70 percent of deaths in Chicago were among African Americans, though they make up only 30 percent of the city's population. Soon, Latinos made up the largest portion of confirmed cases in Illinois.



Damon Jones, economist, University of Chicago

Black people are disproportionately represented in these front-line industries where people are struggling to have a safe work environment. Latinx households are also disproportionately represented in some of those industries. In terms of health insurance, people of color are experiencing the highest rates of unemployment during this pandemic, and so they're potentially most at risk of losing their health insurance. The typical white households have nine to 10 times as much wealth as their Black and Latinx counterparts. That's going to factor greatly into who is going to weather the storm, who is able to make ends meet while maybe these government support systems are delayed or disrupted.



Dr. Ngozi Ezike, Illinois director of public health

I do hope we can come out of this and pay more than lip service, that we can give dedicated dollars, support and resources to help bring up the African American communities, the Hispanic communities, that consistently end up on the short end of the stick when major catastrophe strikes.



Sanchez

When you are in a poor community like Humboldt Park, like Norwegian American Hospital is, and you take a look at the health profile of the community, there's a high incidence of cancer, diabetes, heart failure, obesity—you name it. So we have all the underlying conditions that worsen a patient's condition who gets COVID.



Nicole Robinson, vice president of community impact, Greater Chicago Food Depository

Something that I hope all food banks are thinking about is how we strengthen Chicago's overall food system for the long term, not just as a response to COVID, but as a response to what was wrong before COVID—the inequities around unemployment, racism, violence. We want to build a food system that brings the dignity, the equity, the access they need so there's no difference in life expectancy whether you live in the North Shore or you live on the South Side.

Large-scale loss

According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Illinois still ranks in the top 10 for per-capita deaths related to COVID: 59 deaths per 100,000 residents. Michigan has had 64. New York, excluding New York City, has had 79. (NYC alone has had 279.) Lingering health issues for those who recover remain unclear.



Ezike

Early on, I think I remember the totals were like 30,000, 40,000 predicted deaths statewide—what seemed like astronomical numbers. Conservative estimates might've said 40,000. Others were at 100,000. It was mind-boggling to think about what could happen and how our state could be so impacted by this new virus that we'd really just started to hear about over the holidays.



Dr. Sharon Welbel, infectious disease chair, Cook County Health

There's definitely a sense of loneliness to our patients. Also just the way that this disease has people looking so well and then, in a very short time, looking very ill and in critical care for a very long time. We often see tragedy, but we don't have a whole hospital full of that. It's devastating, it's overwhelming, it's exhausting.



Pritzker

This is the most important thing that any public servant can do, to try to keep people healthy and save their lives. So when lives are lost, that feels like a failure.



Caprara

Certainly in April, and very much in May, we were getting an onslaught of people telling us to open up the state, forget the benchmarks, and just let everybody go back to work and see what would happen. Every time we would be faced with that, we'd think about all the people that could be dead.

A new normal

With in-person meetings, nonessential travel and even handshakes canceled, people have had to adopt new ways of working and new ways of life. For many, that has meant reconfiguring offices, moving meetings online and implementing new disinfecting routines. For some essential workers, it has meant self-isolating to protect loved ones from exposure. Homeless shelters, prisons and nursing homes grappled with the ability to isolate at all. There's no shortage of unanswered questions heading into fall, when another rise in coronavirus cases is expected to coincide with flu season.



Caprara

In May, my brother was supposed to get married in San Diego. I called and said, "Do you want the governor to marry you?" We did a Skype wedding in the press room. I put a nice dress on that Saturday, went down and watched the

governor marry my brother and his new wife, and then it was over and I went back to work. It's hard when you know all the things this pandemic has kind of stripped away and really taken every little extra piece of joy out of your life.



Robinson

The Greater Chicago Food Depository has seen, on average, a 120 percent increase in demand since January.



Matt DellaMaria, senior vice president, investor relations and communications, AptarGroup

We've had some fragrance customers who buy fragrance pumps from us come to us with new requests: "Hey, we're going to switch over to make some antibacterial lotions. We've never done that as a main product. Can you help us?".



Dr. Elizabeth McNally, director, Center for Genetic Medicine at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine
We're still very much driven by this question: Why do some people get so sick from this? We're rolling out one study, which is to do serology across a lot of Chicago, sampling neighborhoods to understand what exposure looked like. If we can answer that question, we can understand who to protect.



Preckwinkle

Cook County is anticipating a \$290 million shortfall this year with a \$410 million shortfall projected for next year. So everything is on the table to try to address those fiscal challenges, and we will try to do it in the way that has the least harmful impacts on the communities we have to serve.



Brad Cole, executive director of the Illinois Municipal League

We started recognizing municipalities were going to lose almost the entirety of their tax base. There's going to be some very difficult decisions local officials are going to have to make and that residents are going to have to be included in to decide: What are the priorities now? What can we afford?



Toia

Twenty to 25 percent of restaurants will not reopen. Our leaders in Washington, D.C., need to come up with a restaurant recovery act.



Jeanette Taylor, alderman, 20th Ward

We don't have any food. Elders call me about personal hygiene, diapers. They're worried about getting kicked out. Is what the mayor's proposing enough when it comes to rent relief for 90 days? I've got a ward full of essential workers. They ain't paid like essential workers, but they've got to work. I've got people who can't afford to pay their rent that are scared to be homeless.



DellaMaria

Working remotely seems to be something that is going to be here in some form or another, not only for Aptar but for other companies.



Dr. Allison Arwady, commissioner, Chicago Department of Public Health

We are very much in the first part of COVID response. Nobody knows for sure when we'll be in control, when a vaccine will be available. We're trying to think of best-case and worst-case scenarios, but planning on the order of years. It's the right way for people to be thinking about this, unfortunately.



Social Media Dashboard



Insights and Activity Report

July 24-August 20



COOK COUNTY
HEALTH

Social Media Summary

July - August Activity

During July 24-August 20, the communications team posted content on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn for Cook County Health.

Posts included content such as COVID-19, interviews with local media, recognition for physicians and the hospital and health tips.

Facebook: 34 posts

<https://www.facebook.com/Cookcountyhhs/>

Instagram – 21 posts (*does NOT include stories*)

<https://www.instagram.com/cookcountyhealth/>

Twitter – 41 (*includes retweets*)

<https://twitter.com/CookCtyHealth>

LinkedIn – 12 posts

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/cook-county-health/>

Social Media Insights

As of August 21

Twitter (28 Day Summary)

- Impressions: **36K**
- Profile visits: **582**
- Mentions: **61**
- Followers: **3,055** (up **83**)

LinkedIn (30 Day Summary)

- Impressions: **22.1K**
- Unique visitors: **504**
- Followers: **5,279** (up 207)

Facebook (28 Day Summary)

- Post reach: **69.4K**
- Post engagement: **6,869** (up **38%**)
- Page views: **1,775** (up **4%**)
- Page likes: **4,550** (up **75**)
- Page followers: **5,727** (up **80**)

Instagram (7 Day Summary)

- Impressions: **2,274**
- Reach: **616**
- Profile visits: **124**
- Followers: **1,824** (up **11**)

Top Social Media Posts

July 24-August 20



COOK COUNTY
HEALTH

Top Social Media Posts: Facebook

Post Performance

- Reach: **3.6K**
- Reactions, comments and shares: **185**
- Views: **1.2K**



Cook County Health...

Cook County Health doctors, nurses and staff share their thoughts and personal and professional experiences with systemic racism and its effects on health disparities and health inequities in a new video series. Dr. Ameera Haamid, emergency medicine...

3:57 - Uploaded on 08/14/2020 - Owned - Appears Once - View Permalink [↗](#) - Copy Video ID [📄](#)

Top Social Media Posts: Facebook

Post Performance

- Reach: **809**
- Reactions, comments and shares: **267**
- Clicks: **120**



Top Social Media Posts: Instagram

Post Performance

- Impressions: **807**
- Reach: **730**
- Profile visits from post: **10**



Top Social Media Posts: Instagram

Post Performance

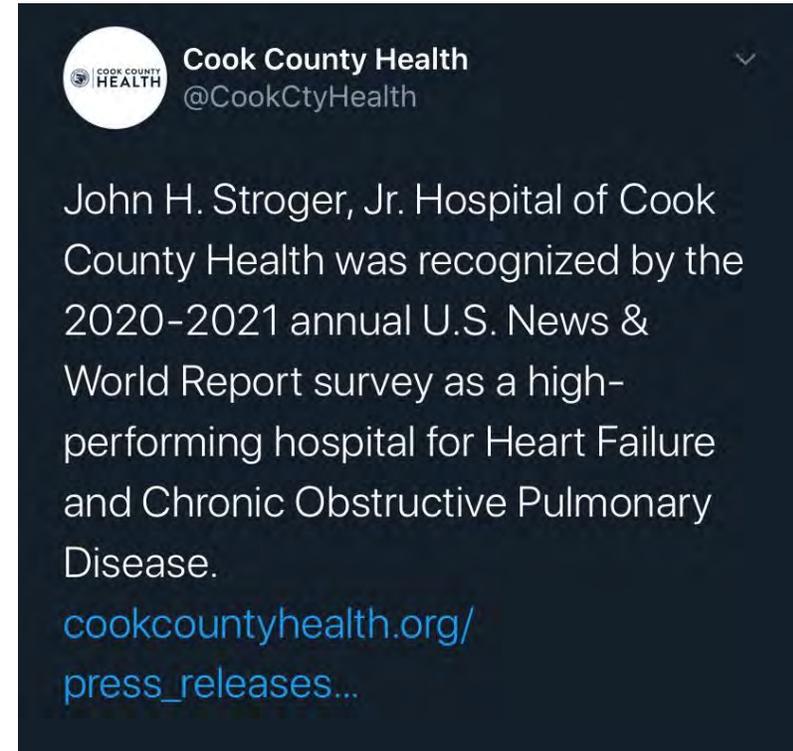
- Impressions: **724**
- Reach: **634**
- Profile visits from post: **9**
- Views: **434**



Top Social Media Posts: Twitter

Post Performance

- Impressions: **2,059**
- Total engagements: **31**
- Engagement rate: **1.5%**



Top Social Media Posts: Twitter

Post Performance

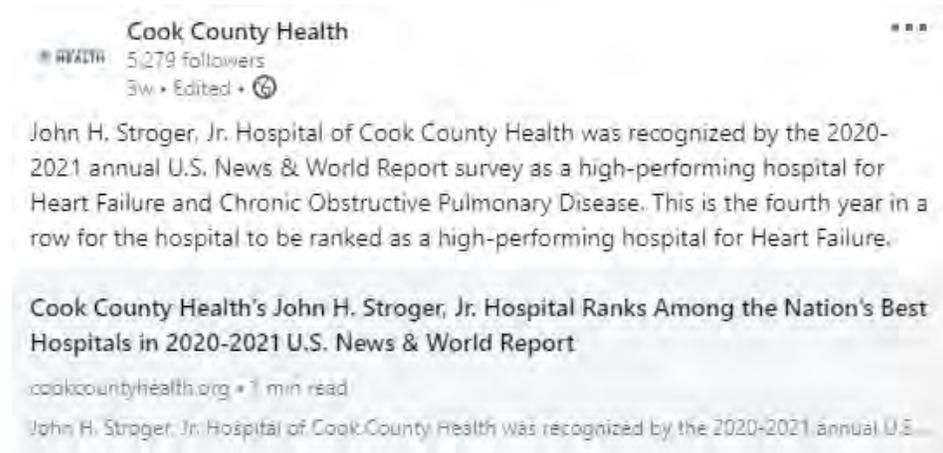
- Impressions: **1,789**
- Total engagements: **26**
- Engagement rate: **1.5%**



Top Social Media Posts: LinkedIn

Post Performance

- Impressions: **2,878**
- Clicks: **73**
- Engagement rate: **5.11%**



Top Social Media Posts: LinkedIn

Post Performance

- Impressions: **2,059**
- Clicks: **80**
- Engagement rate: **6.12%**

Cook County Health
5,279 followers
2w • 🌐

Earlier today, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and the Cook County Medical Examiner joined CCH to discuss the increase in suicide cases among African Americans with 2020 on pace to be the worst year in over a decade. The overwhelming sense of isolation, despair and hopelessness during this pandemic that have been felt by many black youth has contributed to some extreme self-destructive behaviors and impulses of which ultimately results in increasing numbers of suicide. If you or someone you know are experiencing suicidal thoughts, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255).

