

While the United States saw the largest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases on June 24, Illinois has been in a decline in confirmed cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. Cases are rising in southern and western states including California, Texas, and Florida. In Houston, the hospitals are nearing capacity and discussions are underway for tent and temporary hospital settings. Hospitals in Texas cities of Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio are now back to only providing emergency and COVID-19 services – elective surgeries and procedures are suspended. New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut are now requiring visitors from the states experiencing high volumes of cases to quarantine themselves for two weeks upon arrival (although the states do not have a way to enforce the quarantine).

While we watch parts of the country deal with the COVID-19 virus that resulted in Illinois placed under a ‘Shelter at Home’ order and many restrictions and closings, we need to keep in mind that the virus will go where it is invited. Wearing face masks and keeping social distances will serve to protect others and you as well. As Rotarians we have a motto of ‘Service Above Self’ – let’s continue our great efforts and protect those that are most vulnerable and susceptible to COVID-19. The virus has not disappeared, it just is being contained from spreading due to all of the support by the public.

Illinois Entering Phase 4 of COVID-19 Response

With caution, Illinois enters into Phase 4 of a 5 Phase plan on Friday, June 26. As some organizations are ready and meet specific Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) requirements, others may not. It is best to call ahead and check with business or service provider you wish to visit.

The Phase 4 plan allows for the following changes:

Gatherings: All gatherings of 50 people or fewer are allowed with this limit subject to change based on latest data & guidance

Travel: Travel should follow CDC approved guidance

Health care: All health care providers are open if they meet state guidelines – check with your healthcare provider as some do not have adequate personal protective equipment or do not meet other guidelines. Nursing homes, assisted living, and disability homes are still on lock down but will allow for compassionate care visit or outside the facility visits pre-arranged with nursing home and following strict prevention rules.

Education and child care: P-12 schools, higher education, all summer programs, and child care open with IDPH approved safety guidance

Outdoor recreation: All outdoor recreation allowed

Businesses:

Manufacturing: All manufacturing open with IDPH approved safety guidance

“Non-essential” businesses: All employees return to work with IDPH approved safety guidance; Employers are encouraged to provide accommodations for COVID-19-vulnerable employees

Bars and restaurants: Open with capacity limits and IDPH approved safety guidance

Personal care services and health clubs: All barbershops, salons, spas and health and fitness clubs open with capacity limits and IDPH approved safety guidance

Entertainment: Cinema and theaters open with capacity limits and IDPH approved safety guidance

Retail: Open with capacity limits and IDPH approved safety guidance

Nursing Homes

Illinois Nursing Homes are allowed to have residents participate in outside visits with families and friends. However, the nursing homes must meet certain requirements before they can offer this to family and friends. The nursing homes must not have or had active COVID-19 cases in the past 28 days; they must have adequate PPE on hand; no nursing home staff shortages; and access to COVID-19 testing.

As of June 7, Illinois nursing homes reported 20% of them with nurse staff shortage; 25% were short on nursing home aides; 12% did not have a week supply of gowns and 5% reported not have a week's supply of gloves and 8 nursing homes reported having no gloves.

Visitors must check with the nursing home to see if they qualify to having visitors. Visitors must pre-register with the nursing home; meet the health requirements the day of the visit including not being recently exposed to someone with COVID-19; and wear a mask and keep a social distance. Residents will be accompanied by a nursing home staff person at all times. Nursing homes can limit the times of visit and number of visitors based upon the nursing home staffing and resource capabilities.

Still Challenged.....

Keep in mind, 55% of the COVID-19 deaths in Illinois were nursing home residents --- and most likely they acquired COVID-19 from staff that showed no COVID-19 symptoms. The COVID-19 virus is being acquired in the community and then brought into the nursing home. And yes, often times any infection spreads quickly within a nursing home due to residents' physical vulnerability; inadequate PPE; lack of infection control and prevention protocols; and close proximity of residents. It is important for nursing homes to have routine testing of staff; assess staff health before each work shift; and have the necessary personal protective equipment. Right now, a little more than 4% of all Illinois nursing home residents have died of COVID-19.

As we move ahead and enjoy our ability to visit with family and friends, do your best to protect yourself and others. Yes, wear face masks as required; in group settings; outside if you cannot keep a social distance; and when you are encountering anyone with a chronic health condition; or immune compromised condition --- help save their lives.

Stay healthy and protect your loved ones – family, friends, neighbors, and your fellow Rotarians!

June 25, 2020