

# Tampa Bay Times

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**CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC** For the latest news, go to [tampabay.com/coronavirus](http://tampabay.com/coronavirus)

## Unity detours into division

Politicians' initial unified response on virus splinters into familiar arguments.

BY STEVE CONTORNO  
Times Political Editor

For a moment, everyone seemed to be on the same side in the fight against the coronavirus — the side of flattening the curve.

Public health experts and doctors were guiding decisions. State and local leaders of all political stripes shut down bars, restaurants and



President Donald Trump

large gatherings to slow the spread. President Donald Trump, parroted his top infectious disease advisers, asked Americans to drastically change their habits for 15 days and warned the economic sacrifice could last until July or August.

"We're not thinking in terms of recession," Trump said on March 17. "We're thinking in terms of the virus."

But as the end of that 15-day social distancing period approaches, there's a growing chorus of conservatives questioning whether the economic toll of these government restrictions is worth it. Some, like Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, have gone so far as to suggest senior citizens risk their well-being, if not their lives, to preserve the economy. Even Trump chimed in, suddenly proposing that the nation end its social isolation on Easter.

Now, as the death toll from the disease approaches 1,000 and with experts predicting

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### Nearing records

8 a.m. Noon 4 p.m. 8 p.m.

72° 82° 84° 78°

0% chance of rain  
More on 10A



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# PINELLAS: STAY HOME

Despite the county's new directive to its IM residents, it excludes many businesses.

BY TRACEY MCMANUS  
AND MARK PUENTE  
Times Staff Writers

As a further measure to curb the spread of coronavirus, the Pinellas County Commission on Wednesday unanimously directed the county's nearly 1 million residents to stay at home except for essential activity like trips for groceries, medical needs

and jobs deemed essential.

The "safer at home" directive, which takes effect at 11:27 a.m. today and will last at least seven days, also permits residents to exercise outside as long as they keep 6 feet from others and avoid groups larger than 10 people.

The step was needed, county administrator Barry Burton

said, because even after officials closed public access to the county's 35 miles of beaches Friday night, people still crowded bookstores and held social gatherings, ignoring warnings that social distancing could stop the spread of the virus.

"Our health professionals are pleading with us that if we don't act now, it will be too late," Bur-

ton said. "The residents of Pinellas County and the Tampa Bay area need to take this seriously."

The directive specifies three dozen categories of businesses that are considered essential and can remain open, including groceries; infrastructure like utilities, distributors and construction; government services; health care providers; gas sta-

tions; restaurants serving only to-go food; news media; laundromats; banks; and hotels. It keeps open parks and boat ramps.

The directive allows non-essential businesses to remain open as long as they follow Centers for Disease Control social distancing guidance. **Commis-** See PINELLAS, 5A



DIRK SHADD | Times

People gather Tuesday at North Shore Park in St. Petersburg. A health professor calls social meetups "playing with fire."

## CLOSE CALLS

Less social, more distance can save lives, health officials warn.

BY CHRISTOPHER SPATA  
Times Staff Writer

**ST. PETERSBURG**  
In an effort to save lives across the planet, a large swath of humanity, including much of this nation, is barred from leaving home for anything but food, medicine or essential work.

Citizens of the United Kingdom get one form of exercise per day, close to home, alone or with people they live

with. No outdoor exercise is allowed in Italy's Lombardy region. People must carry permits explaining why they're even on the street.

In France or in China a drone might spot you if you're out past curfew for any reason. In Vancouver it could mean a \$1,000 fine. Dozens in Spain have been arrested for such violations. Around much of the globe, including America's largest cities, you can't visit a friend or relative — even a young healthy one

— without breaking the rules, or at the least, the guidelines for slowing the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Tampa Bay on Monday, dozens of men gathered at St. Petersburg's North Shore Park in St. Petersburg for an intense game of soccer, shirts versus skins. They were there again Tuesday evening. The nearby tennis courts were lively. Friends met up and sat side-by-side on blankets and benches to watch the

See SOCIAL, 13A

### PANDEMIC UPDATES

**New test site at Raymond James Stadium:** Hundreds turned out Wednesday but testing criteria remain strict. **3A**

**Tampa General employees positive:** Four workers have been sent home to self-isolate for up to two weeks. **3A**

**Q&A:** What the new rules limiting movement in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties mean. **8A**

**Senior shopping hours:** With long lines before daybreak, Publix's dedicated hour kicks off with mixed results. **6A**

**Snowbirds, before you head home:** Seasonal visitors considering an early return may be better off staying, experts say. **3A**

**\$2 trillion stimulus nearly set:** Congress has come to an agreement. Here's how it will help. **7A**

**The opening day that wasn't:** The Rays' season was supposed to open today. **10A**

**Note to readers:** Today's tbt\* weekend section on scenic drives was printed prior to any "stay-at-home" orders in our area.

**Correction:** Business columnist Graham Brink's byline was left off a 1A story Wednesday about coronavirus' links to a recession.

## County may enact curfew

If approved today, Hillsborough's rule would be in force 24 hours on weekends.

BY ANASTASIA DAWSON  
AND CHARLIE FRAGO  
Times Staff Writers

**TAMPA** — After a tumultuous Tuesday of conflicting calls for stay-at-home orders, curfews and other attempts at slowing the spread of the coronavirus, Hillsborough County officials found compromise Wednesday.

The county's Emergency Policy Group asked attorneys to draft a "safer-at-home" order to keep residents at home except when they are performing essential tasks, like getting groceries. The group also asked for a curfew from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. on weekdays and 24 hours on weekends — although essential tasks can also be performed during those hours.

The policy group, made up of local city and county leaders, plans a final vote of approval today in a 1:30 p.m. conference call. If approved, every Hillsborough resident, including those in Tampa, would be covered under the order.

The agreement came just hours after Pinellas County became the first in the Tampa Bay area to issue a "safer-at-home" order.

Tampa Mayor Jane Castor had previously pushed for a stay-at-home order and on Tuesday was ready to issue a citywide directive telling residents to do so. County officials countered that she did not have the authority.

"We may not have been

See CURFEW, 5A



Children perform at the Spurlino Family YMCA at Big Bend Road in Gibsonton. Courtesy of Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA

## School's out, not child care

It's valued by many as an essential service. But kids and caregivers face possible exposure.

BY PAUL GUZZO  
Times Staff Writer

**TAMPA** — Schools are temporarily shuttered throughout the state, as are dine-in restaurants, bars and beaches.

Those suspensions have upended everyday life for Floridians but are deemed necessary to stop the spread of coronavirus.

Still, day care centers remain open and that "creates a reservoir of potential infection," said

Jay Wolfson, the senior associate dean for health policy and practice at the University of South Florida's Morsani College of Medicine.

So why has Gov. Ron DeSantis refused to close them?

Because they are also considered necessary during the pandemic, Wolfson said. "If we close day cares, parents are forced to stay home from work, including physicians and nurses."

The spread of coronavirus has caused society to re-evaluate what is considered an essential service, Wolfson said.

A month ago, for instance, grocery workers were not widely thought as among the most important cogs of everyday life.

Today, however, they are deemed crucial.

The same now goes for child care providers.

"Child care providers provide essential care to essential staff in order for them to perform their essential jobs," said Lind- See CARE, 13A