

Message from the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office Regarding COVID-19

Governor Cuomo announced this week that New York is slated to see the so-called “apex” hit in 14-21 days from today. So as we get closer to the apex, and the Governor continues to ramp up his rhetoric, I wanted to take tonight as an opportunity to share the information we are getting on our briefings and conversations with federal, state and local officials and conversations with medical professionals in our area hospitals and the Department of Health and explain what's going on for anyone who hasn't been glued to the news.

What does “Flatten the Curve” mean? What is the Apex? What is happening in 14-21 days?

The “curve” you've been hearing about - that needs to be flattened - refers to the number of people infected over time if it were charted on a line graph. The goal is to make sure that curve stays below a certain level so that hospitals across the state are not overwhelmed. In other words, we can't all get the virus at the same time or our healthcare system won't be able to provide adequate care for those most vulnerable in our population.



The “apex” refers to the time when that curve - aka the number of infections - reaches its peak. The State's current projection, says that we will hit this mark in approximately 14-21 days, which is much earlier than was originally expected. This is due to what the Governor called “accelerated spread,” which was likely caused by people not listening to their Chief of Staff and leaving their houses. So now, not only will the apex be sooner than officials thought, but at the current rate, it will be higher than originally anticipated. As Gov. Cuomo put it, “That is a bad combination of facts.”

So let me break this down a little further. **The threat isn't actually the virus.** Scientists say the virus will infect 40-80% of the population. The reason you hear these numbers so often is that any virus that we do not have a vaccine for will spread unabated within a population until “herd

immunity” occurs. Herd immunity means that once you get the virus and recover, you will have antibodies that make you immune. Once 40-80% of the population is immune, the virus cannot find enough hosts to continue to spread at a dangerous rate and its infection rate will begin to plummet.

Furthermore, of the 40-80% of the population that get the virus, the VAST majority of people will be absolutely fine. Gov. Cuomo and health officials from around the world have repeatedly said that 80% of the infected population will “self-resolve,” meaning you’ll feel a little crummy for a few days like you have a million times before and then you’ll begin to feel better. Or for some lucky folks, you may not ever have symptoms. So for 80% of the people who get this thing, it’s no big deal.

But 15% of people will need medical care and hospitalization to help them recover, according to the numbers Gov. Cuomo put out today. The overwhelming majority of that 15% of people fall into the highly vulnerable population. According to the CDC, that includes:

- People aged 65 years and older
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility
- People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- People who have serious heart conditions
- People who are immunocompromised including cancer treatment
- People of any age with severe obesity or certain underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, such as those with diabetes, renal failure, or liver disease.

However, even most of those folks who need medical care will be absolutely fine if they get the care they need. Note (because this becomes important later) of the 15% of the infected population who need hospitalization, approximately 15-20% of those hospitalized will need to be hooked up to a ventilator to assist their breathing while they recover. For those who receive the care they need, the survival rate of COVID-19, on its face, is actually higher than it is with the common flu. Hence why the virus itself is not really the threat here.

Here’s the problem. Here’s the threat. And here is what flattening the curve is all about. New York State’s projections show that too many people are going to get the virus all at the same time.

The original projections from two weeks ago showed that without preventative measures, such as the ones we currently live under, 40-80% of the population would have been infected at the same time sometime in the next 30 days.

Now let’s do some math.

1.5 million people live in Suffolk County so if 40% got infected all at once:
 $1,500,000 \times 40\% = 600,000$ people all getting sick at the same time. No big deal for 80% of the infected population, who will self resolve. But 15% of the 600,000 infected will need hospitalization = 90,000 people. Of the 90,000 people who would need to be hospitalized, 15% of that population needs assistance breathing while they recuperate: $15\% \text{ of } 90,000 = 13,500$ people needing ventilators to breathe.

The problem is that in Suffolk County, as is the case in every county in the United States, we don't have that much medical care. Simply put, we have never needed it, so it was never built. As of two weeks ago, we had 2,300 hospital beds and 276 ventilators in Suffolk County. (By far enough hospital beds and ventilators for everyday life.) But now, as we find ourselves in a global pandemic, if preventative measures hadn't been put in place, the numbers I just laid out would absolutely decimate our medical system and every medical system in the state of New York.

So the threat here isn't really the virus. It's crashing the medical system and not being able to get sick people the care they need.

Don't panic. There is a solution. This is what flattening the curve is all about. This is why we are all locked in our homes right now. It's okay that most of us will end up getting the virus. As I said before, for most people, it's no different than the flu, and for those who need medical care they usually recover quickly once they receive that care. Again, the problem is if we all get it at the same time.

So what do we do? WE STAY HOME! We slow the spread of the virus. We prevent ourselves from contracting right now. By doing this, we flatten the curve, and we stop 40% of people from getting sick all at the same time. We reduce the number of infections and spread them out over time. We can't handle 90,000 people needing a hospital all at once in Suffolk County, but we can handle 90,000 people needing a hospital in Suffolk County over many months.

By staying home, you dramatically decrease the infection rate and slow the number of people needing care to a more manageable size. Then on the back end, you do what every layer of government is working around the clock on right now: grow hospital capacity. By doing these two things, you flatten the curve enough and increase the medical capabilities enough to where you find a happy medium, and the number of people who need medical care does not exceed the medical systems' capabilities.

So, let's do a little more math.

We have 1.5 million residents. If we reduce the number of infections, to say, 2.5% down from 40%, then the "apex" only has 32,500 people getting sick at one time. Again, 80% or more will self resolve and be just fine, and 15% will still need hospitalization, but now that's only 5,625 people. If 15% of those folks need a ventilator, that's only 750 people. And now we start to get to much more manageable numbers.

This is why the Governor is being so aggressive about expanding hospital capacity and bringing ventilators and other emergency resources to the State of New York. Because we are flattening the curve, but we still need to expand medical capacity to bridge the gap between what precautionary measures have accomplished and what our current medical capabilities are.

So what is being done to expand our medical capabilities?

- The Army Corps of Engineers has been working to create temporary hospitals to ease the burden on local hospitals and increase capacity, but the timeline for building those hospitals has been expedited significantly. (The temporary hospitals will be located in the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in Manhattan, SUNY Stony Brook, SUNY Old Westbury and the Westchester Convention Center. In addition, the US Navy has deployed the USNS Comfort, which is literally a floating hospital four times the size of Stonybrook Hospital.)

- Existing hospitals have been ordered to increase their capacity by 50-100%. Gov. Cuomo reported today that hospitals across the state have been responsive to the call to increase their capacity. Currently, every single hospital in Suffolk County is on pace to not only meet the mandate but in many cases exceed it.
- There is expected to be a shortage of ventilators. New York State currently has 4,000 ventilators, with 4,000 more on the way from the federal government, plus an additional 7,000 that have been procured. But that's still only half of the 30,000 ventilators that the State has projected it will need at the height of the pandemic. But we are Americans, and as such, innovation is bountiful. People are working around the clock across this country to come up with ways to split ventilators so two patients can use one ventilator, and hospitals are converting anesthesia machines to be utilized as makeshift ventilators. And the State continues to work to acquire more.
- There will be a need for additional healthcare workers as we expand and those on the frontlines fall ill themselves and are forced out of rotation. However, the human spirit to save and preserve life is overwhelming in our community right now and approximately 40,000 health care professionals, including retirees, registered nurses who have switched fields and some medical students close to graduation, have volunteered to work when hospitals become strained.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is in short supply. This stuff is super important because the health care workers who are taking care of those infected are being covered in the virus all day every day. Without PPE, the infection rates inside of hospitals would be astronomical. I can tell you the County is working feverishly to ensure that all 12 hospitals in Suffolk have what they need to keep going each day. Additionally, FEMA has delivered over 1.7 million critical pieces of PPE to New York State for distribution to healthcare workers. Governor Cuomo reported today that although no healthcare worker will be in need of PPEs this week or next week, the State is working to procure more.

I know everyone on our team is deeply passionate about helping others. After all, that is why we do what we do. But there are some who have asked, "Why all the fuss for such a small percentage of the population? It only affects elderly people or the highly vulnerable; it's not me."

It matters because it's human life. These are our mothers, our fathers, our grandparents, our coworkers, our friends, our neighbors, our loved ones, and even strangers. We are all human beings and we all deserve to live. With all this craziness that is happening, it's easy to forget something really wonderful is happening right now too. No matter the race, religion, belief, Democrat or Republican, North or South, East or West the entire world is rallying together to protect the weakest among us. That has never happened before in the history of the human race. And that is something truly special.

Now, let's all take a deep collective breath because THAT was a lot.

So, what does it all mean?

For starters, it means that social distancing works...if people adhere to it. Yes, I'm starting to sound like a broken record, but seriously folks: JUST STAY HOME! This is especially important for anyone over the age of 65 or anyone with pre-existing health conditions. It may not be a life or death situation for you personally, but I guarantee it is for someone that you know. If you have to go out, just stay away from other people. This isn't mustard gas. It's not floating around in the air like some B-rated horror film, just don't interact with anyone else and you shouldn't have a problem. This is what our flight control system at the office is all about.

With that being said, if you fall into the vulnerable population, I would highly recommend you consult a medical professional before you consider leaving your house for any reason whatsoever other than in an extreme emergency. (I mean the hospital kind, not the we ran out of wine kind.)

Is this level of social distancing difficult? Of course. Are we all starting to get cabin fever? Sure. But is it the only way to guarantee that you will not get infected, or spread the disease to other people who may be more vulnerable than you? And has it been proven around the world in places like China, Korea, and Japan as the only way to flatten the curve? YES.

The point is that you don't need to panic, but you do need to do your part. This is on all of us.

Stay Home. Stop the spread. Save Lives. It really is that simple.

CORONAVIRUS NEWS UPDATE:

In case you feel like I haven't given you enough on the virus tonight: Here are the top 10 updates today on the Coronavirus pandemic from across Suffolk County, N.Y. State and the U.S.:

1. The total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Suffolk County is now at 2,260.
2. The number of confirmed cases across New York State surpassed 30,000 today which is more than 10 times that of any other State in the U.S.
3. At the time of this email, Congress has yet to vote on the more than \$2 trillion stimulus package. The current iteration of the legislation is reported to include:
 - a. Direct financial relief for American citizens
 - b. \$130 billion for health care facilities and medical needs (including PPE)
 - c. \$150 billion to state and local governments to aid their efforts
 - d. Funding to provide laid off workers with their salary for four months
 - e. Bailouts for large industries impacted by lost business with oversight that Democrats were hoping for
 - f. Loans for small businesses
4. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin predicted that the \$2 trillion rescue package would pass the Senate Wednesday night and said that Americans will receive stimulus checks "within the next three weeks." Note: there are reportedly income level exclusions to this benefit.
5. June 2nd has become the new "Super Tuesday" in the Democratic primary with numerous states, including Indiana, Georgia, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, rescheduling their primaries. (New York's Democratic primary is still scheduled for April 28.)
6. The FDIC is urging people to keep their money in the bank, as some banks across the Country have experienced an influx of people making withdrawals. They are reminding people that it is best to keep your money in a bank where it is secure, insured, and earning interest.
7. The MTA announced that LIRR service will be cut by about 35% beginning Friday, while preserving regular rush-hour schedules. On subways, service will be scaled back by about 25%.

8. Two states (Virginia and Kansas) have closed schools for the remainder of the year and many school districts across the country are extending their closings.
9. Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, joins the likes of other international celebrities such as Suffolk County DA Tim Sini as the latest headliners to test positive for COVID-19.
10. New York City is implementing a pilot program to close certain streets to cars, allowing pedestrians only, to encourage social distancing. The City is also implementing mandatory social density on playgrounds and in parks, with no close contact sports (such as basketball).

RESOURCES:

NEW: Grocery Store Deliveries: Suffolk County officials compiled a list of which grocery store chains on Long Island offer delivery services or partner with other companies to provide grocery deliveries. The list can be found here: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1-LwaVnqSIX0UWtU3_4im93w311qIQVVb

Employee Assistance Officer: Deputy Chief has been appointed as the Employee Assistance Officer to help all of you navigate the coming weeks and months. If you need assistance with an extenuating circumstance, professionally or personally, please don't hesitate to contact Deputy Chief _____@suffolkcountyny.gov.

Newsday and NY Times: Newsday and the New York Times have lifted their paywalls so that everyone can access articles on the Coronavirus free of charge. For the latest updates on the virus from Newsday, click here: <https://www.newsday.com/news/health/coronavirus>. For the latest from the NY Times, click here: <https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/coronavirus?action=click&module=Spotlight&pgtype=Homepage>.

Suffolk County Coronavirus Text Updates: Call 311 or text COVIDSUFFOLK to 67283 for general updates on the state of the virus in Suffolk County. Residents can also visit www.suffolkcountyny.gov/covid19 to receive the most up-to-date daily reports on the state of the virus.

DAILY REMINDER:

The CDC recommends the following steps to protect yourself and others:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Avoid close contact by putting a distance of at least 6 feet between yourself and other people.
- Stay home if you are sick, except to get medical care.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash your hands.

- Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.

Reminder, if you are feeling any symptoms consistent with the coronavirus or the flu, or you have had direct contact with someone who is displaying symptoms and has tested positive for coronavirus, you must isolate yourself immediately, seek medical guidance, and notify your supervisor.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

I can't tell you what is going to happen in 14-21 days. But what I can tell you is that the largest effort in New York State history is underway to help us. And I can tell you that if you stay home, eliminate interactions with other people, to the best of your ability, and help protect the vulnerable people that you know, everything should be fine in the end.

J. M.
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