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FSC - Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Insider

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Texas State Sen. Bryan Hughes is the Chair of the Committees on State Affairs and on Administration and leads this effort to provide accurate information to the public. Additional information is compiled from FSC medical professionals working on the front line to treat and prevent COVID-19. Find additional resources at <http://fscllp.com/fsc-covid-19-resources/>, including links to all 50 states' primary references on COVID-19 and a state-by-state update on policy responses, updated daily.

Basic Problem

COVID-19 can potentially create a “pig through a python” situation where a large percentage of people develop the virus simultaneously. If that happens in a particular region, as it has in some other countries, the health care system for that area could be overwhelmed.

What people do not seem to understand is that treating advanced cases of COVID-19 is very labor-intensive. One case can occupy several physicians and nurses at the same time. Add to that the fact that COVID-19 is highly contagious, so that the number of people developing severe symptoms happens seemingly all at once, and you have a recipe for running out of beds and other resources, not to mention healthcare workers available to provide care.

Your personal safety is best served by not being part of the “pig through the python”. Use this sheet to stay up-to-date and educate yourself on some of the safety precautions that front-line emergency room physicians take to protect their families.

Political Update

The President signed a record \$2.2 Trillion dollar rescue package on Friday, called the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Called a stimulus package by many in the media, it should more fairly be categorized as a relief act, designed to ease the economic burden of COVID-19 on businesses and individuals.

CARES was ultimately passed with broad bipartisan support. The bill includes:

- \$301B in direct aid to households - \$1,200 per adult and \$500 per child, with phase-outs beginning at an annual income of \$75,000
- \$250B in increased unemployment benefits – an additional \$600 per week in benefits above existing state payments, extension of the period of benefits, and eligibility for independent contractors and gig economy workers
- \$349B in aid to small businesses – forgivable loans for use in paying salaries and overhead
- \$500B in direct corporate aid

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- **\$221B** in tax benefits
- **\$32B** in wages for airline workers
- **\$340B** in supplemental spending (**\$100B** of that in grants to healthcare providers)
- **\$150B** in aid to state and local governments

The CARES Act also includes provisions to limit stock buybacks and executive compensation by companies that receive benefits, because during the financial crisis some companies used funds for stock buybacks and executive bonuses, which was a major source of bi-partisan criticism of the 2008 Emergency Economic Stabilization Act's Troubled Asset Relief Program.

There is optimism that the CARES Act is coming just in time. Last week, a record 3.28 million workers applied for unemployment benefits.

There is some encouragement in the job market. As demand for food and other household products has surged, Walmart, Amazon, CVS Health and other large companies in those sectors say that they need to hire nearly 500,000 workers in coming weeks.

Americans continue to make sacrifices to help others, and this is true of individuals as well as businesses. An encouraging example came from New Jersey-based pharmaceutical company Amneal. Amneal is the sole US-based manufacturer of hydroxychloroquine, one of the drugs that has shown the most promise in treating COVID-19.

India and Hungary are two of the major exporters of hydroxychloroquine, and last week each country announced that they have banned hydroxychloroquine exports, in order to preserve the supply for their own residents.

In contrast, US-based Amneal this week donated 1,000,000 doses to Texas for the treatment of COVID-19 patients as well as 2,000,000 doses to hard-hit New York. The company is also offering help to other states.

On March 29, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued an Emergency Use Authorization to the U.S. Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority to allow hydroxychloroquine sulfate and chloroquine phosphate products donated to the Strategic National Stockpile to be distributed and prescribed by doctors to hospitalized teen and adult patients with COVID-19, as appropriate, when a clinical trial is not available or feasible.

As more cases are diagnosed across the country, America has now passed China in total COVID-19 cases (though there is skepticism as to whether the Chinese government is fully reporting the cases there).

At least five Members of the U.S. Congress and around a dozen state lawmakers across the country have tested positive for COVID-19. None from Texas have been reported, though U.S. Senator Ted Cruz placed himself under self-quarantine for a time after learning he had been in contact with someone with the virus.

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British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced on Friday that he has tested positive for COVID-19, though he will continue to perform his duties while in self-isolation.

The President in the last few days considered a 14-day quarantine of New York, New Jersey, and parts of Connecticut as the number of cases in the greater New York City area has grown dramatically. He announced late Saturday that a travel advisory would be issued, but not a quarantine order.

The President also invoked his powers under the Defense Production Act for the first time and ordered General Motors to produce ventilators. Yesterday, he said he was getting “good reports” on the company.

As more states move toward shelter in place or similar orders, protest grows louder that the economic cost of such measures will be too much for families and businesses to bear.

Twenty-four states have now implemented shelter in place orders: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Another fourteen (including Texas) have such orders in certain counties and cities: Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas.

In Texas, Governor Abbott has resisted calls to impose a statewide shelter in place order. He is leaving the decision, for now, with local officials. The Governor has stressed that if there is not adequate compliance with his current Order, he may put in place more restrictive limits.

These Texas counties and cities have ordered some form of shelter in place:

Counties: Bell, Bexar, Bowie, Brazos, Burnet, Cameron, Castro, Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, El Paso, Fort Bend, Galveston, Gregg, Harris, Hays, Hidalgo, Hunt, McLennan, Rockwall, Smith, Tarrant, Travis, and Williamson Counties.

Cities: Kilgore, Lampasas, Lubbock and New Braunfels.

We note that the shelter in place orders vary widely. Counties like Collin (Plano, McKinney) and Smith (Tyler), for example, allow local businesses significant room to continue to operate (subject to social distancing and the Governor’s Executive Orders). Others are more restrictive.

The Governor’s statewide Order still in effect and which Texans are strongly urged to follow prevents dining in restaurants, requires bars and gyms to close, bans gatherings of more than ten persons, closes schools, and prevents visitation at nursing homes and retirement centers.

Governor Abbott has also ordered that air travelers entering Texas from a point of origin or point of last departure in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, or the City of New Orleans must self-quarantine for a

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period of 14 days from the time they enter the state or for the duration of their stay, whichever is shorter. His Order also specifically empowers and directs the Texas Department of Public Safety to enforce it.

The Governor also announced that 100,000 surgical masks per day would be arriving in Texas by week's end. He anticipates that by next week, that rate will increase to one million per week.

Flanked by Texas plastic surgeons, the Governor announced a large donation of PPE (personal protection equipment) from their professional association. Plastic surgeons and other providers who have halted non-essential medical procedures during this time per the Governor's Order have donated generous amounts of PPE and other medical supplies.

The Governor also ordered that Texas hospital rooms function with double occupancy, except for those patients with infectious diseases or other medical needs for isolation. Governor Abbott mobilized the National Guard to assist in preparing and deploying fully equipped hospital tents at strategic points around Texas. And hotels are being arranged to house those diagnosed with the virus who need to recover in quarantine but do not require hospital care.

In another of the countless examples of businesses adapting and sacrificing to serve their communities, distillers across Texas and the country are converting all or part of their production from alcoholic beverages to hand sanitizer and similar alcohol-based disinfectants.

For residents of a city in Texas, the Mayor and City Council have the responsibility and authority to respond to health concerns in the City. For residents outside the city limits, the County Judge and Commissioners' Court fulfill this role.

Each region of Texas also has a local Public Health Entity that coordinates with the Department of State Health Services and is specifically tasked with helping address the virus. Contact info for local Public Health Entities is here: <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/regions/2019-nCoV-Local-Health-Entities/>.

Latest Counts

As of March 29, 2020, there are 2,552 COVID-19 cases in 118 Texas counties. There have been 34 deaths. The rate of increase and the geographic spread is troubling. 25,483 Texans have now been tested for the virus.

The Texas Department of State Health Services updates official counts before noon each day. The Department has established a helpful COVID-19 dashboard: <https://txdshs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/ed483ecd702b4298ab01e8b9cafcb83>

COVID-19 Facts

COVID-19 is not the flu. COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by a previously unknown coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a family of viruses known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common

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cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Because COVID-19 was discovered in December 2019, much is unknown concerning the disease.

The most common COVID-19 symptoms are fever, tiredness, and dry cough; other symptoms can include aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, and diarrhea. The symptoms start gradually and are usually mild. Some infected people do not develop symptoms and do not feel sick. ~ 1 out of 5 infected people require special treatment to recover and ~ 1 out of 6 infected people become seriously ill and have difficulty breathing.

We believe the disease spreads through small droplets expelled from the nose or mouth when a COVID-19 infected person coughs or exhales. This can lead to another person getting infected if: (1) they touch any objects or surfaces on which these droplets land, and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth; or (2) they breathe in the droplets right after the person coughs or exhales. This is why it is important to stay more than 3 feet away from a COVID-19 infected person and to remove your shoes when you enter your home after walking through a public area.

The infected droplets may remain contagious for several days, depending on the surface. We do not know if, after contracting COVID-19, you are immune from contracting it again.

COVID-19 Protection Strategies

Wash your hands with soap when possible for at least 20 seconds (have little kids sing “Happy Birthday” twice); use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol as a second choice. Dry your hands completely afterwards. Germs spread easier on wet surfaces than dry surfaces.

Cough into your elbow or a tissue.

Avoid touching your face.

If you are sick, self-quarantine and call your doctor about getting tested.

Avoid close contact with people showing symptoms.

Practice social distancing. Avoid shaking hands, hugging, kissing, and sharing food or drinks.

Frequently clean public surfaces.

Hospital workers wear masks specifically fitted to their faces. An amateur attempt at fitting a mask may *increase* the wearer’s chances of getting sick because germs enter through the gaps, are trapped inside the mask, and breathed in repeatedly. Masks are also in short supply and the U.S. Attorney General has asked that the general public stop purchasing them, as *these masks will be needed by the heroes who treat infected people.*

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Eliminate all non-essential travel, in-person gatherings, meetings, and outings where you will be in close proximity to other people. You could unknowingly be a carrier of the virus and by attending mass gathering, transmitting it to the at-risk population.

Travel only when necessary, and drive instead of using public transportation.

Work from home if possible.

Understand that COVID-19 is more serious and contagious than the flu.

Entering the home. If you have been to a place where you were in close proximity to other people, wash your hands as soon as possible, remove your shoes before entering the house, and shower and change clothes as soon as you are able.

Reach out to people by telephone. Self-isolation can lead to depression and negative mental health outcomes. Speaking by phone with others helps both parties' mental health.

Stay informed. This is a rapidly evolving situation that changes hourly. Check both your national and local resources to understand the virus' effect on your day to day life and on a global scale.

In addition to the steps above, here is the process emergency room physician Dr. Markus Forsythe developed for his family before entering their home after interacting with the public in the Pacific Northwest:

Enter from one door only (the garage door). Use hand sanitizer before entering the home. All shoes, coats, and bags are left in the garage. Wash hands for at least 20 seconds immediately after entering.

He also advises that when receiving a package, use a pair of gloves (any kind will do) to open the exterior packaging outside the house. Remove whatever was inside and dispose of the exterior packaging immediately. If the package was shipped over a few days, whatever is inside is probably safe to handle. If it was packed on the day it was shipped, try and set it aside for at least 24 and more ideally 48 hours. Wash your hands thoroughly after opening the package.

As an example, if you receive groceries, assume they were packed on the day shipped. Outside the house, transfer like items into a fresh bag and store them as appropriate (freezer, refrigerator, cabinet) for at least 24 hours prior to use. While the U.S. Food & Drug Administration says there is currently no evidence that COVID-19 is transferred on food, the doctor recommends this as a best practice.

We are continually learning more about how COVID-19 spreads and can be contained. This information is subject to change and we have no responsibility for updating this publication.

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