

HEALTH OFFICER UPDATE, November 19, 2020

We are watching as the case rate for COVID -19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths increase for the Eastern Shore, Maryland and the United States. Talbot County's case rate climbed to 17.6 this week and as a result public schools are going back to virtual instruction until the virus is better contained. Dr. Kelly Griffith and I have been asked what we plan to do to get the students back in classrooms. This may come as a shock to some people but it will take the entire community working together to get the case rate down so students can go back to classrooms. Two people make very little difference regardless of how hard they try.

As long as people keep having family and social gatherings without wearing masks and practicing social distancing, we will continue to have greater spread of the virus. As long as people are in public places and not wearing masks and practicing social distancing we will have spread of this virus.

People want to know what has been mandated and what they have to do. They do not intend to do anything more than what the Governor or local governing body has mandated, and even then they look for any loopholes. The Governor has advised many things that he has not mandated, and many are not following his recommendations: wearing masks and social distancing in public; don't travel to states with high case rate, and get tested and quarantine after travel until test is reported negative; avoid gatherings.

But finding the loopholes has become a game. Face shields are allowed if you can't wear a mask, but no one with any knowledge of the scientific studies will tell you face shields are as effective as masks. People exercising at fitness centers are to wear masks while exercising *unless* someone has a bona fide problem that makes it dangerous for them to wear a mask. It doesn't make it safe for people to exercise in a gym without a face mask, because they are exhaling more forcefully and this increases the risk of transmission even when a person is asymptomatic. Indoor dining is *allowed* but it doesn't mean it is safe when diners pull off their masks to eat and drink for an hour or when tables are too close and *people* are not six feet apart. Weddings are allowed but it doesn't change the fact that a recent one in Talbot County resulted in several cases of COVID-19. Social gatherings are to be avoided, but a recent birthday party for twenty-eight people indoors has resulted in three cases already. The Governor has asked that we limit gatherings to 25 indoors. That doesn't mean 25 people in an indoor space is safe – nor is ten or fifteen. And if there are more than 25 people in a restaurant, this doesn't mean they are safe from infection.

Come on people. No one died and left the Governor or your Health Officer as your parent or guardian. Find a little restraint within yourselves. We shouldn't have to close schools and businesses until we have effective vaccines and wide spread vaccination of the public. We have better options that are less harmful for businesses and residents. All we have to do is care enough about family, friends and our fellowman to control our behavior and

1. Wear masks properly and practice social distancing in public places including your worksite.
2. Never plan a social gathering until this pandemic is under better control and avoid them when asked to attend.
3. Support your local restaurants that have learned that take out, curb side delivery, and home delivery will get them through this pandemic.

4. Go shopping using precautions, and when retail businesses don't care enough about you to have their employees wear masks properly and consistently, then don't spend your money at that business. Money talks and talks loudly.
5. With I-Phone, face time, computers, Zoom and all sorts of ways to connect virtually, stay home and visit virtually.

Everyone is weary and wants this pandemic over except the novel coronavirus. The only way the virus can live is jump from person to person and find cells to live in and replicate. And the most important way it is spread is when we breathe out infected droplets close to another human being to breathe in. This isn't rocket science. Don't hang out and get close to people that are not wearing masks.

As Governor Hogan said, "Wear the damn mask!"