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Coronavirus Emergency Update
Fire Chief Brian Chellios
November 9th, 2020

New Mask Recommendations:

Doctor Vin Gupta, Professor of Health Metrics Sciences at the University of Washington, is one of many medical professionals coming forward and recommending changes to the type of mask being worn by the general public. What have been described as general “face coverings” are increasingly being found to be ineffective in both preventing the spread of COVID and providing protection from acquiring COVID.

The recommended mask for the public is now a 3-ply pleated face mask with ear loops (see picture below) that should be worn when running errands and visiting public places such as grocery stores, post offices, and other places (including work places that are non-medical, non-healthcare, or non-first responder atmospheres). Those having direct contact with COVID patients should wear an N95-type respirator mask.



These masks can be found at places like Home Depot, Wal-Mart, and online via various websites. These masks are considered “disposable” but can be worn more than once by a single user so long as the mask does not become ripped or damp. Look for masks that offer a non-woven fabric outer layer, a high-density filter layer, and a skin-friendly contact layer. “Vanity” or “fashion” masks should generally not be used.

Disposable face masks act as a protective barrier to prevent splashes, sprays, large droplets or splatter from entering the wearer’s mouth and nose. Disposable masks also help prevent the wearer from spreading respiratory droplets. Remember, there may be people out there that are COVID-positive that do not exhibit any symptoms. These people can still spread the virus to others. All of us need to wear a mask.



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COVID “Trick and Treat”:

Just as we seen with Easter, Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day, there was a noted jump in COVID cases in the wake of Halloween. As we know, Halloween was on Saturday, October 31st, 2020. On Friday, November 6th, 2020, there were 18,049 new cases of COVID reported in Illinois in just one day. This represents a daily positivity rate (PR) of 18.34%. 956 of these cases were in Will County (28.30% PR).

Between Halloween and this record-setting day, there was a presidential election that took place across the country. While a large number of voters opted to vote by mail, there were still hundreds of thousands that opted to vote in-person. We are now into day 6 of post-election celebrations and protests. Depending on political kinship, masks are either being worn or not being worn at these events.

The translation of this is that we have to watch the numbers that get reported today and tomorrow to see if in-person voting had a direct impact on COVID cases. Since celebrations and protests are still on-going, and masks are not a consistent variable, we will not know what the collective impact will be until they eventually come to an end. Current President Trump is also planning to hold more rallies in battleground states.

COVID Vaccine:

Depending on your media of choice, you may or may not know that there was news reported on the topic of a COVID vaccine (see the link below). Pfizer made news this morning when they announced that their trial vaccine has a 90% efficacy rate. In comparison, most flu vaccines present a 40-60% efficacy. “Efficacy” is defined as the “ability to produce a desired or intended result.”

This particular vaccine is a two-part vaccine in which protection would be achieved in 28 days after the administration of the first part. Pfizer states it plans to seek Emergency Use Authorization from the FDA, but this is not expected to be considered for at least two more months while additional data is collected. Dr. Fauci stated that this is extraordinarily good news but that he has not yet seen the vaccine data himself.

Pfizer also reported that it does not yet know how long protection lasts from the vaccine. What this means is that it is not yet known if this vaccine is something a person has to get only once, or if it will end up being a periodic, seasonal, or annual shot much like a flu shot. All indications suggest that this was a science-based announcement that has remained free of political influence from either major party.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/09/health/pfizer-covid-19-vaccine-effective/index.html>

We need to remember that this is not just a US problem, but rather a global pandemic. Even once approved, more than a billion doses will be needed. There are two manufacturing lines, one in Europe and one here in the United States. In general terms, there seems to be consensus that healthcare workers would be vaccinated first, followed by first responders, followed by essential workers, and then the general public.

National Strategy:

As a result of the election, the US will have a new President on January 20th, 2021. In the meantime, President-Elect Joe Biden has already announced his COVID Task Force. I will be following information provided at www.buildbackbetter.com to stay informed on any guidance that may come from the President-Elect’s administration relative to COVID that we may have to address at our local government level.