



Public Health Brief

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“Infodemic” (Infodemic is a **blend of "information" and "epidemic" that typically refers to a rapid and far-reaching spread of both accurate and inaccurate information about something**, such as a **disease**. As facts, rumors, and fears mix and disperse, it becomes difficult to learn essential information about an issue.)

We live in uncertain times, constantly being bombarded with confusing information about what to do and not to do. The learned philosopher Yogi Berra once said: “It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the future”. One thing is certain. COVID19 is already the third leading cause of death following cardiovascular disease and cancer, with many more deaths to come.

Let me try to summarize what we have learned, my concerns, and the applications to Alpine County as we look to the future.

What we have learned:

- Outbreaks of COVID19 can happen anywhere/anytime – China, Europe, Latin America, congregate settings such as cruise ships and prisons and nursing homes, cities, and rural areas.
- Anyone can get sick and die. – Sure, the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease are at higher risk, but newborns have also been infected, and the highest numbers currently are in Millennials and Generation X, with 25,000 people dying under the age of 65.
- Long-term effects are common. Serious and probably life-long effects on the cardiovascular and nervous systems are just recently being appreciated, but not yet well understood.
- It is about being around other people much more than touching contaminated surfaces. Sure, still wash your hands, but keep your distance!



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- It's in the air. Sure, those big droplets you share when you cough or sneeze typically fall within 6 feet of you, but then there are the floating smaller particles that persist for hours in indoor poorly ventilated spaces.
- Many people are contagious without actually feeling sick. It is estimated that around 40% of persons infected with COVID19 will never develop symptoms, cannot be identified by temperature scans for fever, but can spread the disease by talking and singing.
- The virus did not go away in the warm summer weather. To the contrary, increased movement and mixing of groups and people caused a peak during the summer months.
- Masks work. Cloth face coverings (We are not talking about the surgical masks or N-95 respirators used by healthcare professionals.) also greatly reduce the number of particles and virus expelled during talking, and also protect the wearer enough to reduce the amount of virus potentially inhaled.

My concerns:

Misinformation and uninformed decision making can kill. Some thoughts:

- There is no "miracle cure". The much-hyped drug hydroxychloroquine has not been shown in multiple studies to be of any help and has significant side effects. Convalescent plasma has been given an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) after exaggerating the benefits. There has not been enough evaluation prior to authorizing this fast track authorization.
- Much progress has been made in the development of a new vaccine. Safety and effectiveness are the two main priorities, especially in our current world of public distrust in vaccines and criticism of government agencies. A current push to request the FDA for an EUA prior to completion of Phase 3 studies is premature. More time is needed before concluding that the benefits outweigh any potential risks. We will be sure to keep you posted.
- Some are now pushing for a "herd immunity" strategy. This would allow COVID19 to spread through most of the population in order to quickly build immunity. Sweden is commonly held up as an example of using this strategy in order to spare the economy. However, not only did it not spare the economy, but Sweden has among the highest case and death rates in the world.
- Lockdowns are killing the economy. Not true! It is lack of individual compliance with orders and recommendations to wear masks and limit close personal interactions with those from outside of your household that cause the spread resulting in tragic disease and death. This disregard



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for the health and safety of individual, family, and community health could potentially slip us backwards into recession and lockdown.

- Of utmost concern is the recent release of CDC guidelines suggesting that close contacts of confirmed positive persons without symptoms do not need to be tested. This troubling and absurd guidance has no valid and scientific rationale and may result in more lives lost. The key to limiting and interrupting community spread of the virus is vigorous contact tracing. Since upwards of 40% of infections are without symptoms, it is essential that large numbers of people be tested in order to direct resources toward those most likely to inadvertently share their infection with others. Of special concern is our high priority of protecting the most vulnerable members of our communities (elderly and those with underlying medical conditions), and our essential workers (healthcare workers and first responders). Without widespread testing, the ability of local health departments to identify hot spots and to keep our communities safe – and open! – are hampered. This guidance puts us in the awkward position of stating that we will not be following the CDC guidelines, and the underlying confusion is but another example of haphazard decision making that hampers our efforts to address the pandemic and protect the public.

Applications to Alpine County:

- We strive to be transparent and trustworthy in presenting and supporting accurate evidence-based policy, guidance, and behavior that is actionable and based on the evolving science as we know it today. We want to state the facts in order to refute the myths. Our goal is that we as individuals, families, and community stay healthy and well – physically, mentally, and economically.
- We will continue to provide testing at 3 sites – Bear Valley, Kirkwood, and Woodfords. Our mobile sites are available for screening those who are asymptomatic or without serious symptoms. Turn-around time is now shortened to 3-5 days, and there is ample capacity for all. The Health Department Clinic and our Warm Line are available for anyone needing consultation or immediate testing. The Health Dept. Clinic is 530-694-2146, and the Warm Line is 530-694-1011. TESTING, ALONG WITH YOUR BEHAVIOR, ARE THE KEYS FOR US STAYING OPEN. IT'S UP TO ALL OF US TOGETHER!
- Alpine County is one of only 3 California counties (Modoc and Tuolumne) in the lowest risk category of 4 tiers, allowing us to move forward with opening additional services and facilities.

For more information, go to: <https://covid19.ca.gov>, and click on “Find what’s open”.



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