

Dear Governor Pritzker,

We are health care professionals collectively involved in preparing and executing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This letter and our signatures represent our individual professional opinions regarding swift action that must occur to curb the potentially-devastating impact on our hospitals, our patients, the city of Chicago, and the state of Illinois.

After mass gatherings this past weekend (Saint Patrick's Day celebrations, crowds awaiting O'Hare Airport immigration re-entry health screenings), we advocate strongly that you go a step further and implement more aggressive mandatory measures to facilitate social distancing as soon as possible and ahead of more cases of COVID-19 that will certainly arise in the coming days and weeks. Such mandatory measures may include but are not limited to:

- **Closing all non-essential businesses including bars, restaurants, gyms, stores (excluding essential businesses such as grocery stores, gas stations, and pharmacies, which need to stay open);**
- **Enacting more support for telecommuting and working from home when possible, including telehealth for our healthcare professionals to avoid overcrowding in our ERs and hospitals for mild cases;**
- **Postponing the upcoming primary election which is surely to lead to massive lines and extending the deadline for mail-in ballots.**

We understand that there will be unintended consequences of these drastic measures, but the alternative is worse. If we cannot slow down the rate of infection immediately, our health care system will be overwhelmed and the economic consequences will be far worse long-term than what people fear in the short-term. This is what we mean when we say to "flatten the curve."

We applaud your sophisticated understanding of this disease and its spread. As you and your public health advisors have previously summarized in your press conferences, COVID-19 is contracted through respiratory droplets (sneezes, cough, just breathing, on hands/surfaces) and should be considered highly contagious. While the majority of patients (>80%) will recover without the need to be in the hospital, up to 10% will be so ill they need to be admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU). The death rate is much higher than with seasonal influenza, particularly for people with certain medical problems. The death rate is also significantly higher for patients over age 60 and possibly over 20% for those over the age of 80.

When the number of cases goes up rapidly (as they have in China, Iran, Italy, and Seattle), hospitals will become overwhelmed and struggle to meet demand. The death rate rises as people that might have been supported and recover can't get care. Chicago is likely experiencing community spread, and the public health and community response will be important factors in determining if our system becomes overwhelmed. It is impossible to prevent many people from getting sick with this virus at this point.

The recommended measures of personal hand hygiene, avoiding touching your face, and aggressive social distancing are burdensome but are the best measures to reduce the number of people getting sick. Just as important, these measures will reduce the speed with which the virus spreads and every day helps us avoid the extent to which our healthcare system will be overwhelmed by the demand; thus "flattening the curve."

The timing and scope of these additional measures are difficult considerations. Any measures at this time could be deemed either overly aggressive or too late. With that in mind, we advocate for steps that may be deemed overly aggressive, as this is preferred in matters of community safety. We commend

you and city leaders for the aggressive actions you have taken to date, such as closing our public schools and also cancelling the St. Patrick's Day Parade to lower the likelihood of community spread.

The hours and days ahead will be critical to mitigating community spread. While recommendations for hand hygiene and social distancing are spot on, their voluntary implementation is clearly challenging and not effective given subsequent mass gatherings despite widely-publicized recommendations for social distancing.

We know these are difficult steps, and we are hesitant to have to recommend them. We as a state may face short-term economic set-backs as a result, but the long-term economic consequences of not acting now are greater. The big-picture perspective is necessary.

We also want to acknowledge that this virus tends to be surprisingly mild and well-tolerated in most kids, healthy young adults, and middle-aged adults. This makes it really tempting to say it isn't a big deal, most people get this virus. Although they may not be severely affected by the virus, young, healthy people must practice social distancing. In South Korea, where significantly-more testing has been done, 20-29 year-olds represented 30% of those infected. Individuals in this age group can have relatively mild symptoms but still spread the COVID-19 virus. If infected, older family members, friends, or other vulnerable community members may be hospitalized or die with this virus, particularly if there are shortages of medical care.

Our state and city have a chance to be a model of public health. Hindsight will not look kindly on actions that are taken too late here. Moreover, as health professionals, we know that the weeks to come are already at risk of overwhelming our fragile healthcare system. Please help us so we can help our communities face this crisis.

Thank you for your consideration of our perspective. We would be happy to discuss further if you have questions or concerns. Likewise, we would be happy to provide resources and guidance to you.

Best regards,

Vineet Arora, MD
Herbert T. Abelson Professor of Medicine
Associate Chief Medical Officer-Clinical Learning Environment
University of Chicago Medicine

Eve Bloomgarden, MD
Assistant Professor of Medicine
Division of Endocrinology, Metabolism and Molecular Medicine
Northwestern University

Shikha Jain, MD, FACP
Assistant Professor of Medicine, Division of Hematology and Oncology
Rush University Medical Center, Director of Social Media and Communications
Rush University Cancer Center

Ali Khan MD MPP
Executive Director, Oak Street Health

Amisha Wallia MD, MS
Division of Endocrinology, Metabolism and Molecular Medicine
Center for Health Services and Outcomes Research
Northwestern University

Laura J. Zimmermann, MD, MS, FACP
Assistant Professor of Preventive and Internal Medicine
Rush University Medical Group Director of Clinical Preventive Medicine
Rush University Medical Center

**** ADDITIONAL SIGNATURES WERE REMOVED FOR PRIVACY PURPOSES****