SANGAMON COUNTY COVID-19 POLICY UPDATE

We are in the midst of an unprecedented and extremely dangerous outbreak of disease. It has affected all ages, all occupations, races and sexes. Sangamon County has already suffered greatly. To date, we have seen more than 300 documented cases and 26 deaths with possibly more cases that have not been identified.

COVID-19 is different from influenza. It is 10 times as likely to be fatal. The treatment is extremely limited with only one very complex medication available to reduce the effects of the disease. In contrast, influenza has a readily available medication that can be administered orally. COVID-19 has no vaccine, whereas influenza has an updated vaccine every year. In our community, just as in the rest of the world, we have identified areas of very high risk. They include nursing homes, shelters, and other areas of congregate living and working.

Because of quick action in March, 2020, other areas of high risk have been avoided, namely large crowds and sporting events. The shelter at home effort has been successful in slowing the spread of the virus to gain time for our medical system to prepare to help those who fall ill. The Sangamon County Department of Public Health has recognized the danger to our citizens and has worked tirelessly to identify, control and prevent the disease. We believe that the control measures adopted have reduced the number of cases that would have occurred. Still, we remain troubled by the continued increasing numbers of illnesses and deaths.

On the other hand, the daily pace of life in our county has been altered drastically and we are aware of the dangers of prolonged restrictions. Therefore, we have attempted to strike a balance, along with the leadership of the state and federal governments, between control of infection and promotion of natural life and commerce. To that end, we have established guiding principles for the restoration of the business and other functions while keeping disease at bay. They are as follows:
FIVE POINT APPROACH

WE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNOR’S PLAN.

NO GOVERNMENT POLICIES OR PROCEDURES WILL GUARANTEE SAFETY FROM THE VIRUS.

WE WILL PRIORITIZE OUR EFFORTS WHERE THEY WILL HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT.

USE EXISTING GUIDELINES TO BE SMART, BE SAFE AND EXERCISE PERSONAL DISCRETION.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR LOCAL METRICS AND KEEP THE COMMUNITY INFORMED.

WE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNOR’S PLAN

The Governor’s plan is phased and regional, which is a smart approach. We believe it could move faster in our region.

We respect what the Governor is trying to accomplish, and we believe that he is sincere in his efforts.

We understand the ongoing economic devastation. It is a factor in our decision making.

We acknowledge that some businesses will not survive even if they do reopen due to ongoing effects of the virus and their impact on consumer practices.

We know that various elements of the community wish to move as quickly as possible to resume the life we all knew before the virus.

We oppose a complete simultaneous re-opening of all segments of Sangamon County.

The Governor’s plan contains two obstacles: The plan doesn’t fully account for the diversity of the state (but we believe that will improve over time and we urge improvement) and enforcement of the plan is problematic.
NO GOVERNMENT POLICIES OR PROCEDURES WILL GUARANTEE SAFETY FROM THE VIRUS

The virus is dangerous and contagious, with high rates of infection, illness and death in all age groups, races and sexes.

The community should understand that at the current time and for the foreseeable there is no absolutely safe way for any place of gathering to operate.

The virus is more widespread today than it was three months ago.

Things could get worse again if we are not cautious.

As such, we must trust that most will act responsibly, but we also understand the risk that some will act irresponsibly. Our response is governed by scarce resources and will be for some time.

WE WILL PRIORITIZE OUR EFFORTS WHERE THEY WILL HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT

Our priorities are congregate settings, vulnerable populations and healthcare operations.

We feel that the most effective use of the local health department’s resources is to focus on those priorities, rather than responding to endless scenarios about every aspect of our lives that have been impacted by this pandemic.

USE EXISTING GUIDELINES TO BE SMART, BE SAFE AND EXERCISE PERSONAL DISCRETION

As with everything else in life, people and business will need to make their own risk calculations based upon the information available to them.

We have engaged with the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce that is working with businesses and organizations to consider within their fields of operation how they might adapt to resume business and keep the community as safe as possible. We expect guidelines in the coming week.

We will communicate information that will allow businesses, organizations, and individuals to make their own decisions on how to adjust to this continuing serious health threat.

The Sangamon County Department of Public Health and our local health experts are available to review the guidelines but cannot guarantee that such plans will insulate against potential legal liabilities or assure the safety of patrons.
WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR LOCAL METRICS AND KEEP THE COMMUNITY INFORMED.

If our local metrics worsen we will not hesitate to take action. We acknowledge that our best tool is education and public information.

Eradicating this virus is our long term goal.

The immediate priority is to maintain the ability of our community and our healthcare providers to respond to a potential future surge, while mitigating further damage to our local economy.

We will continue to be as open and transparent as possible with all pertinent information with the citizens of Sangamon County.

Gail O’Neil
Director, Sangamon County Department of Public Health

Brian Miller
M.D., President, Sangamon County Board of Health

Vidya Sundareshen
M.D., Medical Director, Sangamon County Department of Public Health

Donald Graham
M.D., Medical Advisor, Sangamon County Department of Public Health

Andy Van Meter
Chairman, Sangamon County Board

Brian McFadden
Sangamon County Administrator

William Lee
Coordinator, Sangamon County Office of Emergency Management