

Mark Levine's Online Speech to TPID on How NYC Is Dealing with the Coronavirus

Mark Levine, Chair of the City Council Health Committee, spoke about the virus's impact on NYC at the March 11 online club meeting. He recommended the following municipal websites as sources of local information.

- NYC.gov/coronavirus – dedicated NYC health department website
- Text alert system – text COVID to 692692 to receive updates
- Mark Levine and Health Department (@nychealthy) are both active on Twitter

The following is an outline of Council Member Levine's remarks.

It is no longer possible to track cases back to their origin.

Practicing “social distancing” to limit the spread of infection

- Encouraging telecommuting
- Encouraging groups to cancel non-essential public events

Virus testing

- Failures at federal level; restrictions and mobilization continue to lag.
- Only about 5,000 tests have been administered nationwide, but the number seems to be increasing due to private labs.

- Prioritizing people who are more severely ill.

NYC public schools

- Currently assessing losses to kids (meals, access to nurse, etc.)
- Currently assessing risks

NYC employees

- City council essential staff are now working remotely; sets an example for all agencies
- Keep first responders healthy
- Personal protection equipment to be provided for health care workers

Managing “common touch” areas

- Many of the city’s public areas are being deep cleaned daily
- Any positive testing at a school will lead to school being closed for 24 hours and deep cleaned
- Instructing people to wash hands regularly and avoid touching the face
- Most cases are thought to be transmitted through immediate touching of another person

High-risk age groups

- High risk starts around age 50, and at higher ages increases on a sliding scale
- Pre-existing conditions, such as compromised immunity systems, smoking, etc., can increase risk

State-wide effort to produce hand sanitizer (through state prisons)

Seniors with mobility issues

- Levine's office is exploring providing mobile testing facilities and distribution centers

Coronavirus symptoms

- Very high fever
- Dry cough
- In more serious cases, difficulty breathing

How the virus spreads

- Sustained social contact
- Intimate physical contact (with infected family members)
- Spread by "droplets" (sneezing) and contact with a surface that may have been sneezed on. It is not airborne.
- Contact doctor first prior to going to doctor's office or ER
 - Call 311 if you don't have a doctor
 - Need to protect patient privacy

Economic business relief

- Currently providing 0% interest loans to businesses with fewer than 100 employees if they can prove 25% losses
- CUNY (as well as some private colleges) have switched to online classes only
- Need to assume that some people with the virus have taken public transit

Working with city, state, and federal agencies

- City and state working well together
- City officials frustrated and concerned with resources and messaging coming from federal government
- City still somewhat dependent on federal government

Paid sick leave

- Majority of workers should be guaranteed for 5 days of paid sick leave (any employer with 5 or more employees)
- Inform Labor Department if you feel your employer is violating that
- ML believes city should start looking into mechanism to help those who should remain home but will incur economic hardship by doing so
- Also pushing governor to put a moratorium on evictions during this time period

Closing thoughts:

- Should be prepared for number of cases to reach very high levels
 - Typically have 100,000s of “standard” flu cases each year
 - Could mean great strain on hospital resources
 - Moderate cases may need to self-treat at home
- NYC does have a lot of resources that will help us through this
 - Levine’s office is preparing an e-mail with all relevant information, which Three Parks can forward