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Help Us Help You

A message from Illinois hospitals and health systems during the COVID-19 pandemic

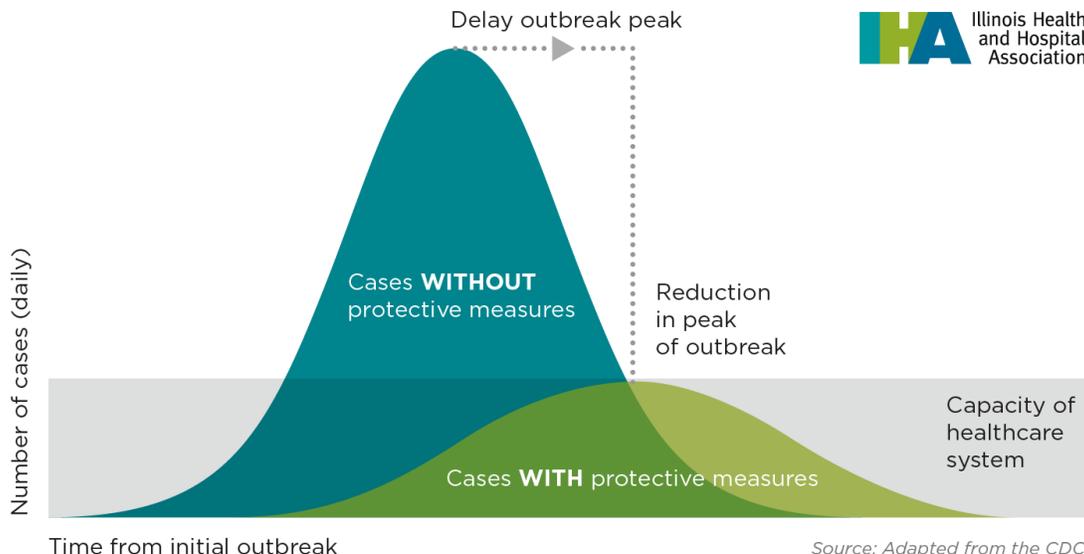
Naperville—The Illinois Health and Hospital Association (IHA), along with its 200 member hospitals and nearly 40 health systems, today called on all Illinois residents to help hospitals prevent a surge of COVID-19 patients by protecting themselves, their families and their neighbors.

Help Us Help You—aims to reduce the spread of the virus now (“flatten the curve”) so hospitals and health systems have the capacity to provide life-saving care to seriously ill COVID-19 patients over the coming weeks and months.

“We must slow the spread of the virus,” Michael Wahl, MD, Medical Director of the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) at IHA, emphasized. “If this does not happen, a large number of people will get sick in a very short time frame, which will overwhelm our healthcare system as all seek care at the same time.” IPC is assisting the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) run the state’s COVID-19 hotline (1-800-889-3931).

IHA’s call to action supports Governor J.B. Pritzker’s “Stay-At-Home” order issued on Friday, March 20. The order, which took effect Saturday evening at 5 p.m. and continues through April 7, requires all Illinois residents to stay home with few exceptions. The Governor and Illinois Department of Public Health announced on Sunday an increase of 296 COVID-19 cases and three new deaths in the state, bringing the total number of cases to 1,049 (in 30 counties) and deaths to nine.

“We fully support and commend the Governor for implementing a statewide stay-at-home policy,” A.J. Wilhelmi, President and CEO of IHA, said. “By staying inside and away from others, there is less chance to spread the virus, so fewer people will get sick. This will decrease the surge of symptomatic patients on our healthcare system, and the capacity to care for the critically ill will be less likely to be exceeded.”



Dr. Wahl encourages all Illinois residents to follow the practices set forth by IDPH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which include:

1. **Social distancing, including shelter-in place and self-quarantine where indicated.**
2. **Washing your hands frequently.**
3. **Calling your healthcare provider BEFORE seeking medical care.** If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and symptoms such as coughing, call your healthcare provider before going to a clinic, emergency room, or searching for a COVID-19 testing site. Patients with mild to moderate symptoms should seek healthcare counsel from their physician, if possible, as the critical resources and staff available in the hospital emergency department need to be preserved for the most critically ill.

“Over the past two months, Illinois hospitals have taken extraordinary and swift action in response to the coronavirus outbreak,” Wilhelmi said. “They are prepared thanks to staunch emergency preparedness and infection control training.”

Preventative measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 have included:

- Screening all patients and staff before entrance;
- Enhancing sanitation protocols;
- Limiting or prohibiting visitors;
- Conserving necessary supplies; and
- Offering increased telehealth services.

“Many hospitals are also shoring up their capacity to admit more patients by postponing or canceling non-urgent appointments,” according to Wilhelmi. “They are rearranging operations and staff—and working with other hospitals—to ensure adequate beds and supplies. Several hospitals are arranging childcare options to support their hard-working employees.”

In addition, hospitals across Illinois are working to implement COVID-19 screening and testing procedures. However, due to a continuing national shortage of COVID-19 test kits and materials, many hospitals and medical professionals are not able to offer testing currently. Until those shortages can be resolved and testing capabilities increased, people should not leave their homes to seek a test unless they are advised to do so by a healthcare professional.

“The role of hospitals as community safety nets has never been more apparent,” Wilhelmi said. “Throughout this outbreak, patients continue to present with broken bones, heart attacks, strokes and other emergencies not related to COVID-19.”

Hospitals are concurrently committed to treating those patients and protecting them—and staff—from exposure. Isolation wards were built with this specific purpose in mind, but many hospitals have also erected tents outside their facilities to test possible COVID-19 patients separately.

“Much of our society has screeched to a halt,” Wilhelmi said. “Hospitals have not. From Chicago to Champaign, from Rockford to Effingham to Metropolis, hospital staff are working tirelessly 24/7 to carry their communities through this difficult time.”

For the latest information about COVID-19, prevention, treatment and resources, see the state of Illinois' new website, [coronavirus.illinos.gov](https://coronavirus.illinois.gov).

About IHA

The Illinois Health and Hospital Association, with offices in Chicago, Naperville, Springfield, and Washington, D.C., advocates for Illinois' more than 200 hospitals and nearly 40 health systems as they serve their patients and communities. IHA members provide a broad range of services—not just within their walls, but across the continuum of healthcare and in their communities. Reflecting the diversity of the state, IHA members consist of nonprofit, investor-owned and public hospitals in the following categories: community, safety net, rural, critical access, specialty, and teaching hospitals, including academic medical centers. For more information, see www.team-iha.org. Like IHA on [Facebook](#). Follow IHA on [Twitter](#).

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