



MESSAGE

FROM MAYOR DAN GELBER

This morning, Wednesday May 27, the State Department of Health reported that the number of COVID-19 cases in Miami-Dade County passed 17,000 and 655 people in our County have succumbed to the virus. These two charts show the amount of new COVID cases per day for the last 14 days, and the amount of new COVID cases each day for the entire 2-3 months we have been fighting this virus in our community. I wanted to give you a full sense of the lifespan of this virus up to now.

While we have been focused on the last 14 days, the number of cases we are still getting... between 100 to 200 per day... are still significant. The virus is only going downward now because we implemented so many measures that effectively reversed its direction. We stayed at home, closed parks, golf courses, beaches, restaurants and hotels, and wore masks and washed our hands. So now, because of our diligence, and because of this downward trajectory, we are slowly and cautiously opening up our economy.

But we cannot construe the openings of elements of our economy, as an "all clear." People should not interpret the downward trajectory as proof the virus is gone and not coming back. But the hope is that as a community we will be able take measures to protect ourselves and our loved ones. Every guideline still directs us to continue the physical distancing, to wear masks and to continue to wash our hands. We have learned ways to control the spread of the virus, so we will need to continue to rely upon those measures.

So here is where we stand. As you know last week we opened up retail and other businesses including museums and houses of worship but with significant limits and protocols. Today, Wednesday May 27, we are applying very similar measures as we open up restaurants at 50% capacity. We have already been approved for street closures throughout the City, so many places will have access to outdoor café tables. So you know, dozens of city staff have been working with our restaurants to make sure they are prepared. The rules and suggestions can be found on our website or by calling the City where someone will explain to you what to expect.

We have already worked with hundreds of the 800 or so restaurants in our city to help them navigate this new normal. Still we expect less than half to open in this environment. It's been tough and toughest on businesses, like restaurants, whose business model typically embraces higher volumes of patrons. But they are so integral to our community, and we want to help them endure.

On June 1, we will be opening our beaches and, likely, our hotels. While the physical distancing rules will be well publicized prior to opening, here is what to expect. Everyone should have a face covering with them when on the sand. No groups over 10 people will be permitted. Groups under 10 will need to wear masks if they are not exercising physical distancing except for members of the same household. There will be plenty of ambassadors reminding beachgoers of the rules. I know this may detract from the experience we expect on our beaches, but it is necessary for now so thanks for your cooperation.

You can also expect condo pools to open around this same time next week with safety guidelines.

Again, we can't treat this as an "all clear." If we do and ignore all our previous efforts, we will likely change the trajectory of the virus so that it begins to spread again. Remember, in less than 3 months it has claimed over 655 lives in our County and it is no less deadly today than it was when we started on this journey. But we can make this work if we join together and reopen safely.

Finally, this week is Beach High's graduation as well as the graduation of many from other schools and colleges and universities – like my daughter Sophie who graduates from Tufts University. So I wanted to take a few moments to talk to our graduating seniors. I remember fondly my graduation from Beach High 42 years ago. And not just because I had hair and an odd attraction to big red velvet bow ties. It was an important passage to me and to my classmates.

Due to COVID-19, the typical version of your graduation experience won't happen. The last few months have brought an abrupt and undoubtedly disappointing change in conditions. Teams, clubs, competitions, all cancelled. And the expected final few months of your school experience... all ending suddenly. I know it feels unfair. You watched previous senior classes share the anticipation of graduation, the parties, and events... culminating with the celebration of the moment of graduation with your family and friends.

So while I am sorry this was not the final few months of school you expected. There are lessons you can extract from this that you may not realize.

What I didn't get in my senior year was an incredible lesson in the ways that all people are connected. That what happens on another continent can have an impact on us here at home. That you can't isolate yourself because ultimately the world is much smaller than we think.

The year of my graduation, I didn't have a front row seat to the courage that exists in the world.

I didn't understand that there are professions that require real heroism, as much as that of any soldier... like nurses and doctors who risk their own lives repeatedly for people they don't even know. Or checkout clerks at the grocery store who keep working notwithstanding the peril.

My senior year didn't teach me that sometimes you're asked to do something... like wear a face mask... that isn't for you but for everyone else. For a grandparent or a stranger. Back then no one ever told me how much I would have to rely on others, or them on me.

I didn't appreciate my friends and family the way you have, because for me their presence was something I just took for granted.

And I had absolutely no concept that much of my life, and the health of those I love, would be so reliant on advancements in science, technology engineering and, yes, the dreaded math.

Yes, my graduation, and those of nearly every other class, followed the traditions that typically defines a senior year. And you still should do many of the traditional things like really thanking your parents, your teachers and administrators. But if you think about it, your experience, perhaps not as fun, is entirely more meaningful. You've been through something completely unique and been presented with life lessons that other graduates from other eras were denied.

COVID-19 Class of 2020 you might not be able to share in all the graduation pomp and merriment in traditional ways, or in ways you had expected, but you are way more prepared to face the world as the very best version of yourselves.

So go forth, 6 feet apart, and congratulations!