



MESSAGE

FROM MAYOR DAN GELBER

This morning, Monday September 21st, the State Department of Health has reported that COVID-19 cases in Miami-Dade County surpassed 167,000 and more than 3,000 people in our County have succumbed to the virus.

[Let's dive into the numbers](#). We continue to inch downward in the right direction. Our daily positive cases are in the vicinity of 450 or less each day, and the number of sick needing hospitalization remains under 50 for the last few days. Also, our positivity rate has been under 5% for the last week as well. So let's talk about what we take from these data points and answer some obvious questions about what's next.

First, these are fortunately much better numbers than we have seen for a few months. So we have a reason to be optimistic. And you can expect that the County will begin opening up more elements of our economy. But the numbers today are also slightly worse than we experienced the last time we reopened in May, when, if you recall, the surge that followed was enormous. That spike only hurt our economy more, set us back months, and undid many gains we had made against the virus.

So am I worried our reopening could result in another surge? It would be irresponsible not to be concerned. I suspect many of you are as well...which is a good thing, because it means we are approaching this reopening with caution and remembering lessons learned. Notably, when we opened in May, we did not have a mask mandate. This and other measures have made a difference in controlling the virus. Also, our contact tracing program, while still underperforming, is much better staffed than it was. We have also learned how critical it is to reopen in phases. so we can see if we are able to control the surges of the virus. So while we can get back some of the normality of our lives, we must be smart. Follow all the same guidelines especially masks and distancing.

If you want to be tested, we will continue to have a drive up and walk up testing center at the Convention Center, but the state is not renewing the field hospital lease past its current term ending October 7.

I hear every day the frustration and fatigue in our community. I read every email and text and take every phone call. People want to see their grandkids, and just have dinner with friends. Many understandably are desperate to get back to work as the impact has been very tough especially for our hospitality industry.

Some believe we should just open everything up and deal with it. Some point to facebook posts or articles advocating a different approach, or contend that we should just let the virus sweep through our community so we develop what is known as “herd” immunity.

Please don't rely on information that confirms an outcome we would all like to see but is not factually accurate. The data here in Miami Dade, our experience here, and our doctors and health professionals here all confirm that we need to remain cautious.

Consider that when we reopened without sufficient caution and these counter-measures in place, an unfathomable amount of people died. On the date of our last reopening on May 18th, 566 residents of Miami Dade had succumbed. In the time since that reopening almost 2,500 more have perished, nearly 5 times as many in about the same amount of time. But when we reinstated the curfew and some closures, and mandatory mask usage, the numbers came down slowly but decisively. So we know that the measures we implemented worked and curtailed the disease. Caution worked.

Our experts have explained the math. For every 100 people that are hospitalized, nearly one-third will be so sick they will end up in intensive care. And about 40-70% of that group will die. That means of the 319 people who needed to check into hospitals in our County this last week, we can expect about 60 of them will not survive. And our health experts uniformly tell us that if we just let it spread through the community to try to develop “herd” immunity the results would be staggering. One conservative estimate puts the number at an additional 14,000 deaths in Miami-Dade alone.

Caution has also saved lives because over the last 6 months, therapies and treatments have improved. I would much rather catch the virus in 3 months than 3 months ago. The survival rates, even without a vaccine, are markedly better. So, the longer people can go without getting sick, the better the outcomes will be.

So, as we slowly reopen, and move into phase two, let's be smart and learn from our past. Wear the mask. Don't treat this reopening as an “all clear.” Be cautious.

Now, a quick report on some non-COVID happenings in the City. About 3 months ago I asked our City staff to compile all the ideas we should be considering to expedite the transformation of our Entertainment District into a true Art-Deco Cultural District. On Thursday, the Commission had a workshop where we introduced the dozens of measures and ideas intended to accomplish this reimagination.

Some of the ideas dealt with policing and liquor sales, in an effort to tamp down the “anything goes” vibe that currently defines the district, but many more ideas addressed how to alter the essential nature of the district through incentives, physicality of streets and programming that defines the area. We reviewed new ideas to pedestrianize Ocean Drive and change the streetscape of Washington Avenue. Many ideas focused on how to activate more cultural events so that we signal to the world who we are. Zoning changes were presented that would allow hotels and businesses to diversify the economy and industries that would trigger the transformation.

I've urged my colleagues to be bold, because anything less won't do. We need this district to be a place for everyone. Visitors, residents, families. It's too special a place to continue the way it has. So stay tuned.

Finally, this past weekend Jews around the world celebrated Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, 5781. It is a time to reflect and renew. This year has given us so many reasons to do both. While we have seen much despair and pain, we have also seen incredible displays of courage and kindness, especially from so many of our medical professionals who have really acquitted themselves as heroes to our community.

So thanks for your kindness, your patience and your sacrifice. Stay healthy and at home. Shana Tova.