



MESSAGE

FROM MAYOR DAN GELBER

This morning, Monday April 20, the State Department of Health has reported that COVID-19 cases in Miami-Dade County surpassed 9,300 and 209 people in our County have succumbed to the virus. The Miami Beach and County numbers have also increased but at no greater rate than previously. Two numbers worth reviewing are the new COVID patients requiring hospitalizations and the number of COVID patients on ventilators. Both seem to have come down from highs in mid-April - but remain somewhat consistent. I think this suggests while we have made good strides - we are in no way out of the woods. Based on the expected survival rate of patients on ventilators - it's pretty clear that hundreds more will die to this disease.

So I wanted to continue to discuss opening up, and directly address some of the voices in our community that are asking we open up beaches, and those that want to dramatically curtail the measures that have essentially closed down so many of our businesses, industries and recreation options.

First, there will be a loosening of restrictions for some of our recreational areas very soon. When Mayor Gimenez announces that he is modifying his County orders closing parks, marinas and golf courses, we will do the same but in a manner that works for our City. So most of our parks will soon be available for mostly passive activities with some limited opportunities for recreation. Tot lots and work out areas, which encourage constant touching, will be closed and most team sports that make social distancing impossible will be prohibited. The same will occur with our golf courses and our marina. They will be open but with limits to promote social distancing. Our Manager and his team will have very specific rules and guidelines available when these openings occur.

So let's talk about our Beaches, which many are asking be reopened. Some are questioning why they can't be reopened just for Miami Beach residents. Let me be as clear as possible - we cannot legally open up our beaches just for our residents. That is not permitted under Florida law at all. So if we open them up - we open them to anyone from anywhere who wants to enjoy them. Anyone. And unlike other places - our beaches are entirely open and accessible. We are not Jacksonville. If we open it is certain that many thousands will flock to our miles of open beaches in south beach and north beach and in between. Young people on permanent spring break, and many people just itching to get out. Enforcing some kind of limits on use would be a nightmare. I'm sorry but we will have to do without Beach access for the near future. Although circumstances might cause us to reconsider, I could not imagine an opening of our beaches prior to early June.

With regard to businesses, restaurants and retail - for the very immediate future we are in no position to open up in any meaningful way. It is clear that our social distancing has saved likely thousands of lives, but we are still in the midst of this crisis. We have not bottomed out and we know that the virus is still spreading in our community.

With regard to hotels and hospitality - it is even more difficult to reopen as soon as some might like. While inviting thousands to enjoy our community is typically what we want - right now it is precisely what we can't tolerate.

Perhaps over the next few weeks, we will see some clarity as to a timetable. If the virus bottoms out in early or mid-May, we may be able to take thoughtful steps toward reopening these businesses in a phased manner.

So we do need to begin preparing even if our reopening may not be in the immediate future. Along with the Manager, Jimmy Morales, and his team, we have begun reaching out to experts and leaders in the business and retail community, restaurant and hospitality industries, along with our art and culture community that is also under severe strain. We have been collecting what they believe their best practices will be - and how they might reopen in a phased manner that maintains adherence to social distancing as necessary. We have also reached out to health care experts who are available to pressure test the viability and safety of these measures. Of course, these efforts are happening all over the world so we are also availing ourselves of the experiences in communities all over the globe and even down the street.

One problem will be the absence of technical competencies that appear critical to any reopening - namely, abundant testing including surveillance testing and the ability to contact trace to prevent or limit outbreaks. There seems to be limited bandwidth to perform these tasks but each day we are making progress.

This virus has been deadly and will continue to infect more of our neighbors. And I realize it has also been economically disastrous. But the point is, we will not rush into a reopening. I believe part of the reason why this has been such a deadly pandemic is that our nation responded with countermeasures too little too late - It would be horrible if we repeated the mistake as we navigate out of this pandemic by doing too much too soon.

So, we will be careful and be guided by relevant medical and scientific expertise. And we will be very forthright with you as to the possibilities and the challenges. I don't want to promise more than we can deliver, or raise expectations that are inconsistent with best practices.

So as always, thanks for your calm and patience. Stay healthy and at home.