

The Lowdown

Sheriff C.S. Blackwood

I have heard people question whether the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic is too extreme. In this emergency edition of *The Lowdown*, I'll discuss why leaders are responding the way we are from a macro perspective, and then I'll focus specifically on the response of the Orange County Sheriff's Office.

Many people who contract the virus only become mildly ill. Although healthy young people can die from Covid-19, statistically, they are far more likely to survive. Those with underlying medical conditions, compromised immune systems, and those who are over 65, however, are at far greater risk.

Here is a short but sobering look at the numbers. The United States' population is approximately 330 million. Assuming 20% contract the virus (a conservative estimate); we will have 66 million sick people. If only 1% of those people die, America will have 660,000 fatalities. Most of those will be our elders, and those who are medically vulnerable.

If 60% of our population contracts the virus, 198 million people will get sick, and almost two million will die.

Our medical system cannot meet that kind of demand. Social distancing slows the rate at which people become sick; in other words, it flattens the curve and allows medical systems to respond to the influx of patients over a longer period of time. Even if the overall number of people who eventually get the virus does not change, if those people get sick across a longer period of time instead of all at once, we create less demand at any one time on critical – and limited - resources. It is tragic that people will die. It is unconscionable that some will die simply because they needed a hospital bed or a ventilator and there weren't any available because people were unwilling to stay home for a few weeks to slow the spread of this illness. So, **NO**, I don't think strict social distancing is too extreme.

As Sheriff, my job is to care about the health and safety of everyone in Orange County – not just young, healthy people. I am not willing to tell at-risk people they are worth anything less than the best efforts of this community. Even if those efforts are inconvenient, uncomfortable, expensive, or – dare I say it – boring, we must accept that we all have an individual responsibility to act in the best interest of others.

The Orange County Sheriff's Office will continue to provide essential services. However, we have taken appropriate steps to restructure our service delivery.

I am responsible for the Detention Center, including the safety of the inmates who are detained there and the staff who care for them. All incoming detainees will initially stay in one of the two

negative pressure rooms we have created. Once we are sure the newcomers are not sick, only then will they transfer into general population.

Additionally, we followed professional recommendations and installed multiple air scrubbers with HEPA filtration in the detention center. Not only do these scrubbers reduce particulate matter and airborne viruses, they significantly improve air quality in the facility.

Health protocols have been reviewed with detention center staff. Employees who do not feel well or have had a known exposure to an infected person must stay home.

Visitation with inmates has been canceled for at least two weeks. Procedures are in place for emergency legal visits or other dire circumstances such as an inmate needing to receive notification of the death of a loved one. These meetings will be conducted using digital devices while the inmate is in a private isolated room. No face-to-face contact will occur.

Because schools are closed, we have a reserve staff of 20 school resource officers who can serve in the detention center or elsewhere as needed. They have been assisting with patrol, working the front desk, and they have been heavily involved in the ongoing efforts to provide food for students and the elderly.

We have not closed our office; however, we have limited some services, such as fingerprinting, to protect the secure areas of our facility. Additionally, until further notice, we are not giving facility tours or attending community meetings.

Patrol deputies will still respond to calls for service. If the call requires a deputy's physical presence to resolve the matter, restore safety and stability, investigate a crime scene, or arrest an offender, those services will still be provided in a professional and caring manner. In such cases, deputies will attempt to maintain six feet of space between themselves and other parties while gathering information and interviewing those involved. People needing law enforcement services can help by turning on lights and turning down the volume on televisions or radios. This helps law enforcement officers assess the situation while keeping the recommended level of distance between parties.

Our Crisis Unit will continue to provide assistance for those experiencing domestic violence, with service delivery modified to protect all parties. The person seeking services will use a special laptop in our lobby to fill out required paperwork with the real time support and guidance of crisis personnel who have a remote connection to that machine. Equipment will be sanitized between users. Emergency hearings for domestic violence protective orders are still available, despite limited court services. The Crisis Unit phone number is (919) 245 – 2950.

Stay safe, be good to one another, and call us if you need us.