Board of Commissioners  
Lamar County  
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Subject: Defense Against Novel Coronavirus

Last week, the County Board of Commissioners declared a state of emergency in Lamar County to help address the novel coronavirus issue. Yesterday, the Governor announced that he was implementing a shelter in place order for the entire state. Our situation is worsening and we must all pull together to minimize the pain and suffering. Without a vaccine or cure for COVID-19 our best defense is slowing the spread of the virus. The only way to do that is to reduce contact between people.

The Board of Commissioners will follow and support the Governor’s shelter in place order. More details will be coming soon about that matter.

Let’s review our situation. The novel coronavirus is a highly contagious disease that can be transmitted from person to person even when the infected person is not showing any symptoms. That means it is almost impossible to detect before a person is infected and contagious. Once we are infected, we may show no symptoms, we may have a mild reaction similar to a common cold or mild flu, we might get sick enough to need medical care, or we might die.

The virus is spread by airborne droplets from our breath or contact, typically from our hands. That is why it is important to maintain at least six feet between each other, not touch our faces, and wash our hands as often as possible. Sanitizing frequently touched surfaces like door knobs and light switches will also help prevent the spread.

The best defense is to avoid contact with other people and surfaces that other people have touched. That is unnatural and especially hard in a close-knit community like ours. But it is the only way to slow and possibly prevent the spread of this virus. Some individuals are essential to our survival, like medical workers and first responders. We also need grocery workers, pharmacy workers, truckers, care givers, sanitation workers, utility employees, and many others. These people are risking their well-being to serve us and we need to respect and protect them as best we can.

To understand the impact this virus can have in Lamar County let’s look at the effect on our medical resources. I’m borrowing some analysis provided by the Rollins School of Medicine at Emory University:

According to very conservative estimates 10 - 20% of our county’s population will become infected. That means that there will be about 1,100 medical visits, 500 hospital admissions, 250 ICU admissions and approximately 50 deaths (80% in people over the age of 65) in Lamar County. Since we have no hospitals in our county 500 of us will be seeking a bed in surrounding counties. Their populations will be competing for those beds and a severe shortage of medical facilities is extremely likely. Our only defense is to slow that surge of patients.
We can impact the course of this deadly virus by altering the replication rate (R0) of COVID-19. Compared to annual influenza, COVID-19 is anywhere from 60 to 100% more “efficient” at replicating itself. For instance, on average 10 patients with the influenza will infect 13 individuals. With COVID-19, (R0 of 2.0 to 2.5), those same 10 will infect 20 to 25 individuals if we do nothing. The power of “social distancing” is best illustrated here:

- Nothing done: 1 infected person infects 2.5 in 5 days and this results in 406 infected persons in 30 days. If we assume 20 people are currently infected in Lamar County that means 8,120 people in Lamar County (43% of us) are infected within 30 days. Many of our essential workers will be infected, increasing the burden on the remaining workers and increasing the amount of suffering across the community.
- 50% less exposure: 1 person infects 1.25 in 5 days and this results in 15 people infected in 30 days. If we assume 20 people are currently infected in Lamar County that means 50% less exposure results in 300 people being infected within 30 days
- 75% less exposure: 1 person infects 0.625 in 5 days and this leads to only 1.5 infected persons in 30 days. If we assume 20 people are currently infected in Lamar County a 75% reduction in exposure means only 30 people are infected in the County in 30 days

It is obvious that the less exposure we have to each other the better the outcome for everyone. That is the reason for the shelter in place order. We have to reduce our contact to reduce the rate of infection before it overwhelms our medical system, our supply chain, even our utilities.

That means we have to stay at home as much as possible. Minimize trips to the grocery store, gas station, or anywhere else. Send one person instead of the whole family. Have that one person use hand sanitizer or wash their hands before they return to the home.

I understand these measures are a huge negative impact on our businesses and our economy. But the alternative is several weeks or perhaps months of total chaos when we have so many sick individuals that we cannot staff our hospitals, grocery stores, water treatment plants or electricity utilities.

Please abide by the shelter in place order. Minimize your interactions with other people. Help protect the essential workers. Do your part and we can all get through this with minimal losses. It is going to be hard, inconvenient, and frustrating. But I have seen this community pull together many times before. That is what we are known for and that is what we need to remember this time.

I pray continuously for the safety of all of you and that we as a community will survive this and emerge stronger and even more closely knit than before.

Respectfully Yours,

Charles Glass, Chairman
Lamar County Board of Commissioners