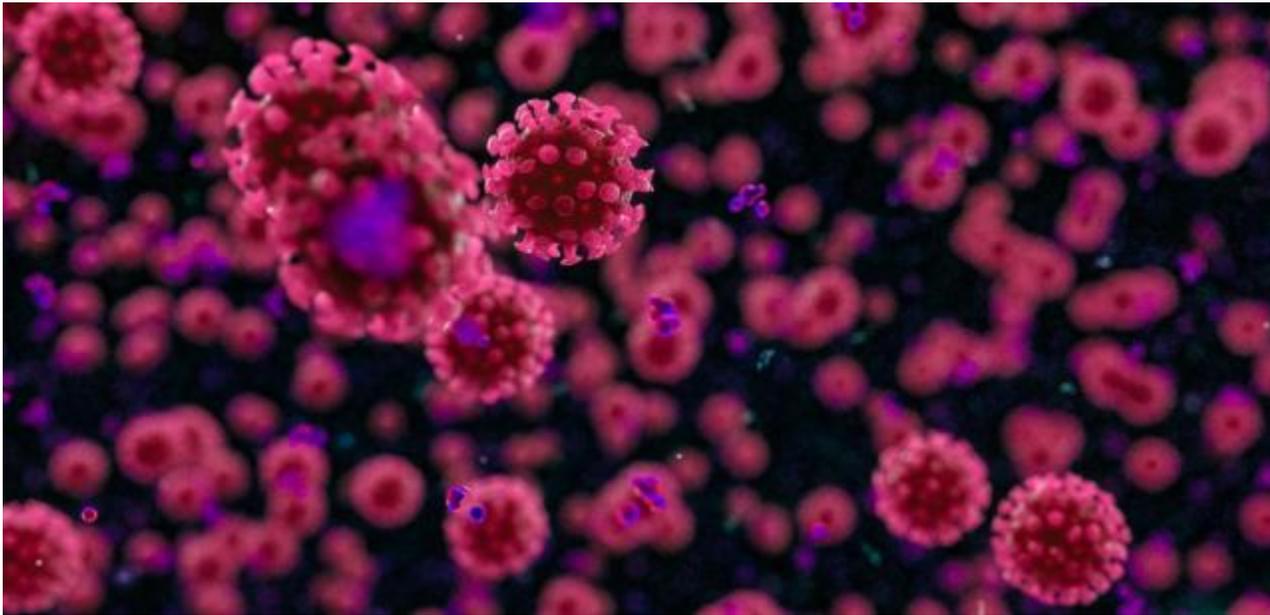


Easter Weekend is Here: Health Experts Recommend Social Distancing, Technology as Keys for Success

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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This is Easter weekend, always a big time for family celebrations and church gatherings but in 2020, it will be vastly different than other years because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Alton Memorial Hospital Director of Business, Rusty Ingram, stressed with Easter weekend to come, that families should continue to follow the stay-at-home models.

“Take advantage as much as possible social media and electronic communications with family,” he said. “We all love to be close to one another on holidays, but we need to get through this crisis and work together. If folks can get through this weekend with gathering in one place that will help so much.”

Madison County Health Department Director of Health Promotion Amy Yeager agreed that Easter social distancing is vital for this weekend.

“It is absolutely important to know it is a challenging time and it will be different this weekend from any other Easter weekend or Passover,” she said. “This is a big family weekend and it will be tough. People will have to be creative. You don’t want to risk exposing grandma or grandpa or other family members to the coronavirus risks.”

Asked about numbers of COVID-19 patients and ventilators, Ingram said that information is not being disclosed from the hospital for privacy concerns and all information in that regard comes from the Madison County Health Department. Yeager said what she can say about ventilators and the entire health care provider supply system for the coronavirus pandemic is in good shape in Madison County. Yeager said the situation is being worked through a command system where people can keep track of equipment or PPE needs. An area coalition of hospitals and health departments are working collectively as a region.

“The long and the short of it is we have everything planned and it is all working,” she said in the health care response in the county to the coronavirus.

Alton Memorial, Saint Anthony’s Health Center and Anderson Hospital have both spoken about how the hospitals are working on all lines of primary care physicians and staff on the COVID-19 situation. Anderson Hospital was saluted by Gov. Pritzker on Friday at his daily press conference for its work to assist the Southern Illinois Healthcare System with expanded testing in the region.

“We are fortunate for the primary care physicians all reached out and asked what can they do to help,” Ingram said. “Fortunately, we are not at a surge point yet. We will need to get through that in the coming weeks.”

Saint Anthony’s Health Center said respiratory therapists who work in regency departments intensive care units and all other nursing units with patients who have lung disease or breathing issues, are caring for an increasing number of critically ill patients near the Chicago area.

One OSF shift manager, Mary Slider, at the OSF HealthCare Little Company of Mary Medical Center in Evergreen Park, an intense location of the coronavirus pandemic, said: “We are on the frontline of giving care, along with nurses, respiratory therapists and others,” she said. She said the team is giving 110 percent to respond to the epidemic. Evergreen Park is a southwest suburb of Chicago where the number of COVID cases has rapidly increased.

“Normally, we would staff five to six respiratory therapists on each shift,” she said. “Now, we are going up to as many as nine or 10 because we need to place one respiratory therapist in every ICU where patients are on ventilators.”

A nurse who works at Alton Memorial Hospital said the worst will still be coming soon for the area. She said she, as well as other staff, are given daily updates regarding the status of Alton Memorial Hospital, as well as all the regional BJC hospitals in regard to the coronavirus.

BJC hospitals are screening at doctor’s offices and hospital entry points for clinical symptoms and travel history; screening criteria continues to evolve with the CDC’s guidelines and adapt to the virus spread.

BJC is following a process to identify patients suspected of infection and coordinating testing, when appropriate with local or state health departments.

BJC is also isolating patients suspected of infection and using CDC-recommended personal protective equipment to reduce the spread of infection. The health company is also managing personal protective equipment and supplies to ensure caregivers have the equipment they need to safely provide care. BJC is also screening visitors for illness, limiting the number that can visit at one time, and prohibiting individuals under age 16 from visiting.

“As health care leaders, we are working with a sense of calm caution on behalf of our patients, visitors and each other by working with our employees regarding travel restrictions on screening, canceling, or postponing events and encouraging team members to use technology to attend meetings and stay connected with colleagues in other parts of the country,” BJC said. “Together we can minimize the risk and keep the St. Louis area thriving in the face of this challenge.”

Medical professionals remind everyone to continue taking precautions. The situation could be worse if not for the current social distancing practices and everyone using good hygiene. The hope is that with these continued efforts everyone will navigate in more safe fashion through the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Kassie Garland also contributed to this story.](#)