

# Chicago Tribune

# CHICAGOLAND

## CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

# State expands range in new batch of testing

Workers who aren't showing symptoms will be included

BY JAMIE MUNKS AND RICK PEARSON

State officials on Friday announced a further expansion of COVID-19 testing in Illinois, with testing now open to a range of front-line workers and employees at essential businesses and new testing sites opening across the state over the next week.

Along with first responders and front-line workers in health care and other fields, employees of grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants and gas stations can now seek COVID-19 tests whether or not they're exhibiting symptoms.

Also on that list are people who have been exposed to someone who has a confirmed case of COVID-19, state and local government employees and people with compromised immune systems or chronic medical conditions.

More widely available testing is one of the primary benchmarks that each of the four regions defined in Gov. J.B. Pritzker's reopening plan must meet in order to advance to the next phase.

Right now, all four re-

gions are meeting the positive-test rate set by Pritzker's reopening plan in order to move to the next phase of his plan, which could start May 29 at the earliest.

The seven-day average of positive coronavirus cases in the Northeast region, which includes the Chicago area, fell below 20% as of Monday. The 14-day average statewide positivity rate is under 14%, Pritzker said.

To move forward the share of people testing positive for the coronavirus must be at or under 20% and increase no more than 10 percentage points over a 14-day period.

"The positivity rate can be an indication of how widespread COVID-19 infections are among our population," Pritzker said. "We all want the positivity rate to come down, which would indicate a declining number of people getting sick from the virus."

Officials announced 2,432 new known cases of coronavirus Friday, pushing the statewide total of known cases to 90,369. Another 130 deaths were reported Friday, for a statewide total of 4,058 deaths since the pandemic began.

To date, 538,602 COVID-19 tests have been performed in the state, with officials on Friday reporting

26,565 tests conducted during a 24-hour period. Illinois was one of many states that struggled to expand testing earlier this year, amid a national shortage of supplies and testing kits.

In early April, the state fell short of a goal Pritzker set to conduct 10,000 tests per day in Illinois. At that time, around 75,000 tests had been conducted in the state.

The state for the first time surpassed 10,000 tests per day on April 24, and over the past week has conducted an average of 20,000 daily tests.

In the third phase of Pritzker's reopening plan, gatherings of up to 10 people are allowed, and offices, manufacturing and salons and barbershops are among the types of businesses that can reopen, with precautions in place aimed at preventing the spread of coronavirus.

Once a region moves into another phase, the time period in which it must reach all of the benchmarks to advance to the next phase starts anew.

To reach the fourth phase, when schools, child care centers, restaurants and bars could reopen and gatherings of up to 50 people would be allowed, the plan calls for testing to be widely available regardless of whether someone is ex-

hibiting symptoms, among other metrics.

"As we open up more testing sites and as we make available more materials for testing, I think we're in a much better place," Pritzker said Friday in response to a question about how close the state is to reaching that level of testing capacity. "So we're making a lot of progress, I feel like we're on a path to being in that spot as needed for every region in the state."

New drive-thru testing sites are set to open on Chicago's South Side on Saturday and Rolling Meadows on Wednesday. There are now 251 sites in the state offering free testing, Pritzker said.

Pritzker for the first time Friday acknowledged that his wife and daughter were in Florida before Illinois' statewide stay-at-home order took effect in March, and just recently returned to Chicago.

He said he was being "very private and very reserved" about his family "because there are threats to my safety and to their safety."

"You have seen that there are people that stand outside the Thompson Center and stand outside the Capitol in Springfield, holding, I mean, hateful signs that reference me personally and

that suggest, if not say, but suggest the potential for violence," he said.

On April 29, Pritzker testily responded to a question about a Patch.com report that his wife and family had gone to Florida amid the governor's stay-at-home orders. "My official duties have nothing to do with my family. So, I'm not going to answer that question. It's inappropriate and I find it reprehensible," he said of stories about his family.

That response prompted an outcry from Republican and right-leaning groups that the Democratic governor's own wife wasn't heeding the mandates of Pritzker's stay-at-home order, though Pritzker never imposed an outright travel ban for residents.

"If his family can't even heed the guidance of his own stay at home order, how does he expect Illinois voters to do the same?" said a May 4 email from the Republican National Committee with the subject line: "Governor Pritzker can't take the heat."

Pritzker said he hoped that an unnamed Republican super political action committee "that's pushing stories like this about my family, would stop doing it because they are putting my children and family in danger."

But on Friday, Pritzker acknowledged his family had only recently left Florida, where they had been staying since at least early March, before his stay-at-home order was issued. He owns an equestrian farm there.

Pritzker owns a horse farm in Racine, Wisconsin, and he indicated his family was there. "I just will say we have a working farm. They're there now. There are animals on that farm, that it's an essential function to take care of animals at a farm, so that's what they're doing," he said.

A Pritzker spokeswoman later clarified that the family is at home in Chicago and have visited the farm but haven't stayed there.

On April 19, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services issued guidance for Illinois residents and others who have a seasonal or second home in the state, urging them not to travel or face 14 days of self-quarantine.

"You should bring your own groceries and essentials as self-quarantine does not permit shopping at local stores for supplies," the agency said.

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## Rally calls for more awareness

Nurse Jessie Matthew holds a photograph of fellow nurse Maria Lopez — who died May 4 after contracting the coronavirus — during a rally and vigil Friday to bring awareness about medical workers contracting the disease. The service, held outside the University of Illinois Hospital, 1740 W. Taylor St. in Chicago, also stressed the ongoing need for sufficient supplies of personal protective equipment for front-line workers.

## Tollway collections down \$52M in April

Agency: 55% drop in passenger traffic during the month

BY MARY WISNIEWSKI

The Illinois Tollway brought in \$52 million less in tolls during April than projected, due to the coronavirus pandemic's impact on travel.

Officials said toll collections were about 42% under projections for the month. In the first four months of the year, the agency brought in about \$73 million less than projected. However, the loss has not resulted in any halts in construction or layoffs at the agency, officials said.

"We're continuing the important work we have going," said Tollway Executive Director Jose Alvarez. He noted May numbers are looking better.

"What's important to us is that we've been able to keep folks working and keep on track with our 2020 capital plan," Alvarez said.

Tollway construction work includes rebuilding the milelong bridge on I-294 in the southwest suburbs that carries traffic over

two major railroads, the Des Plaines River, the Chicago Sanitary & Ship Canal, the Illinois & Michigan Canal and local roads.

The Tollway has been using all-electronic tolling since mid-March, eliminating the need to exchange cash. Those who do not have an I-Pass transponder have to pay online, and the Tollway has seen an increase in online payments. Tollway officials do not see the loss of cash tolls as much of a factor in the revenue drop, since 90% of Tollway users use transponders.

Typically, after 30 days, drivers who miss tolls get a violation notice and a \$20 fine, but the agency has temporarily suspended violation enforcement.

The Tollway saw about a 55% drop in passenger vehicle traffic in April, while commercial traffic was down 15% to 20%. The financial impact for both groups was similar, since trucks pay more tolls, officials said. The Tollway has seen some increase in traffic in the first couple of weeks of May.

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## Storms swamp Deep Tunnel, forcing raw sewage into lake

BY MICHAEL HAWTHORNE

Two days of rain overwhelmed Chicago's underground labyrinth of sewers Friday, forcing a noxious mix of sewage and stormwater into local waterways and Lake Michigan.

At 2:30 a.m., the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District opened a sluice gate separating the lake from the North Shore Channel in Wilmette, allowing millions of gallons of human and industrial waste to flow with runoff into the water supply for 7 million people in Chicago and the suburbs.

The gate didn't close again until 5:45 a.m.

It marked the second time in seven months that a surge of murky, debris-strewn water prompted the district to rely on the region's sewage outlet of last resort.

Up to 4.5 inches of rain fell

across the Chicago area on Thursday and Friday, flushing a torrent of waste mixed with runoff from rooftops, streets and parking lots into sewers and stormwater tunnels stretching from Wilmette to Westchester.

Even a flood-control reservoir more than 20 times bigger than Solider Field couldn't handle the deluge.

The reservoir, in southwest suburban McCook, is part of the \$3 billion Deep Tunnel system of cavernous sewers built to collect and store sewage and runoff from Chicago and the Cook County suburbs.

When construction began during the mid-1970s, officials billed the Deep Tunnel as an engineering marvel that would "bottle up rainstorms."

But it remains incomplete, and the Tribune has previously reported that billions of gallons of bacteria-laden sewage and runoff still routinely pour into local waterways during and

after storms.

As little as two-thirds of an inch of rain can lead to sewage overflows.

The problem begins with the city's location. Chicago was built on a swamp, and storm runoff has become more difficult to manage as development paved over the city and suburbs.

To make matters worse, sewers in Chicago and older suburbs handle runoff as well as waste from homes and factories. When it rains, the combined sewers quickly fill up, forcing a noxious brew to flow back into basements and out of dozens of overflow pipes into local streams.

Waste poured out during the past two days at 64 locations on the Chicago River, North Shore Channel and Des Plaines River, district records show. The Chicago Department of Water Management fielded 350 calls about basement flooding as of Friday afternoon.

Locks and gates to Lake



JOSE M. OSORIO/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Vehicles turn around due to a flooded overpass on Lawrence Avenue in Schiller Park on Friday morning.

Michigan are opened only if waterways are saturated to capacity and the Deep Tunnel is full.

Climate change is challenging the system more than ever.

Despite the region's giant tunnels and reservoirs, Lake Michigan has been hit harder during the past 12 years than it was in the previous two decades combined, mostly because of a handful

of monsoonlike storms that were among the most intense downpours in Chicago history.

From 2007 through 2019, records show, the water reclamation district released more than 36 billion gallons of runoff and wastewater into the lake. By contrast, 12 billion gallons poured out from 1985 through 2006.

The McCook Reservoir

eventually will be capable of holding 10 billion gallons, up from 3.5 billion today. But it won't be fully operational until 2029.

The nonprofit Center for Neighborhood Technology is nudging government officials to change their focus with a program it calls RainReady, which combats flooding with building, plumbing and landscaping improvements that in some cases are coordinated with sewer upgrades.

Suburbs including Midlothian, Oak Park and Wilmette offer grants to help residents install rain gardens, regrade their lots and make other improvements to protect their homes from flooding.

In Chicago, an ambitious version of the program developed for the Chatham neighborhood has been repeatedly delayed by City Hall.

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