

Office of Missouri Governor
MICHAEL L. PARSON

Dear members of the State of Missouri team –

We are public servants. Now is our time. Missouri will need us in the coming months more than ever as the COVID-19 virus hits the health of our fellow citizens and our economy. Every family will be touched in some way.

No one ever wants to face such a challenge. There is no doubt, though, we will rise to meet it. We always have. Just think about last year's floods and tornadoes. We have to. There is no one else who can do what we do.

That is easy to say, but hard to do. In COVID-19 we face a different kind of challenge. We all will be unsettled at times. We have to think and act in new ways.

I never imagined, for instance, I would have to tell my 11 year old son that he might be a risk to his grandmother's life. But he is. He needs to understand it. He needs to change his behavior. After all, young kids may not be severely affected by COVID-19 but they may transmit the disease to others. Until the outbreak passes, my son will not play with his friends. Why? Because we can't risk him becoming infected since his grandmother lives with us now. Nearly 80 years old, if she becomes infected, she is at high risk of serious health complications. A lot of little changes and inconveniences can add up to a big difference.

Similarly, for weeks all our departments have been taking action to protect our teammates while we continue to serve our fellow citizens. We now enter a new phase in implementing our Continuity of Operations Plans. Today Governor Parson ordered we move to increase social distancing even more by shutting all our offices to the public. We also are scaling back our physical presence in state offices even further. Some departments are already at 100% telework. At the other end of the spectrum, other departments need to have most of their staff onsite, in person, every day. Think of those working in our prisons, veterans homes, mental institutions, and other state run. They are all taking special precautions. Follow your departments' guidance today and in the days ahead.

I am a realist – so I like to think most people operate best when they know the real deal. We don't know everything we would like about COVID-19. It is a new virus. The science has just started. The testing around the world has been limited.

Nonetheless, a group of infectious disease doctors from across the state just updated the Governor on what they see in the frontlines. We are experiencing “community

transmission.” This means Missourians are infecting each other with COVID-19; it is not just something that comes from travelers. We should expect a significant increase in confirmed cases in the coming weeks, especially as testing ramps up. This is just the math of how infectious diseases can spread.

Anyone can become infected. The good news is that many cases have been and will be mild or even “asymptomatic,” which is just a big word meaning “no signs of sickness.” But not for everyone will be so lucky. Young and old alike can become seriously ill and require medical attention. The data so far indicates that older people and those with preexisting health conditions have much higher risks of severe complications (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/people-at-higher-risk.html>). No one should be complacent, however.

Our best defense remains prevention. Every person who avoids infection now will help prevent 2, 4, 8, or even 16 infections of others in the weeks ahead. Again, that’s just the math. The sooner we act and change our behaviors, the better.

Remember our state workforce is around 50,000 employees. That is a big number in Missouri. That is a bit less than 1% of Missouri’s population. Practically speaking, that means we should expect to see more of our teammates confirmed as positive for COVID-19 in the days ahead as the virus moves through our communities.

This reality will be hard on our teams. We need to be there for each other as best we can to reassure and comfort and listen. Throughout, we need to continue to follow the public health advice and guidance from the Office of Administration and department leaders.

Looking forward, soon we will have team members recover fully from COVID-19 and return to work. We need to make sure that having had COVID-19 never becomes a stigma.

There was a British poster from the Second World War that said simply: “Keep calm and carry on.” You probably have seen the image on a t-shirt. I remember one of my British colleagues in Afghanistan had it on his coffee mug. That always stuck with me. Some advice is timeless.

Let’s help each other keep calm even in the midst of this challenge. As Governor Parson has stressed, when facing a challenge like COVID-19, concern is understandable and responsible, but we need to avoid fear.

What is a good way to do that? Keep yourself informed with reliable information. That way we can do what we need to do to protect ourselves and others. This means, for instance, if we have a fever or don’t feel well, we don’t first go to our doctor’s office or an emergency room, but instead call in advance to get professional guidance and avoid contact with others. If told to stay at home, we should truly self-isolate in our home to protect our families and roommates.

Here are sources to check for regular updates:

- For Missouri: Department of Health and Senior Services <https://health.mo.gov/living/healthcondiseases/communicable/novel-coronavirus/>
- For the United States: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- For global effort: World Health Organization <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

In the coming weeks, I urge us to take very seriously the advice of Governor Parson and our public health experts. Act upon it. Let's urge our family and friends to as well. Remember every person who avoids infection helps protect others. In this time of challenge, our fellow citizens, communities, and families need us to be in the fight.

Thank you once again for everything you do and will do to help Missouri.

Best regards,

Drew Erdmann

Chief Operating Officer

State of Missouri

PS: For more information for state employees on our COVID-19 response and current policies, check out our one-stop-shop for information for team members: <https://oa.mo.gov/personnel/state-team-member-resources>