4 Steps the Coronavirus Task Force Must Take, According to 50+ HIV Groups

We have more than 30 years of lessons learned from fighting HIV, hepatitis and STIs, reads a letter to Vice President Pence.

May 7, 2020 By Trent Straube

What steps must be taken to fight COVID-19 before reopening the U.S. economy? More than 50 HIV organizations offer four recommendations on that subject in a May 5 letter addressed to Vice President Mike Pence, who heads the White House coronavirus task force.

In the introduction to the letter, the organizations, which are members of a national coalition known as the Federal AIDS Policy Partnership, point out that they have "more than three decades of lessons learned about how to stem the tide of deadly pandemics [including HIV, hepatitis, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and tuberculosis]. We also know the devastation that is caused when these best practices are not followed and American lives are unnecessarily lost."

The letter, which was obtained by POZ, then lists four ways the White House task force can help prevent and contain the novel coronavirus, which causes the potentially lethal COVID-19 disease. The HIV groups urge the task force to take these steps before attempting to reopen the nation's economy. According to the letter, the four recommendations are:

- Exponentially expand COVID-19 testing in order to focus on rigorous and universal community testing;

- Ensure adequate resources for a robust public health surveillance system with necessary privacy protections to inform COVID-19 decision making;

- Build on the existing comprehensive contact tracing system to ensure that people who have been infected with COVID-19 are aware of their infection and can take steps to avoid infecting

others; and

- Ensure strong privacy protections to combat fear of discrimination or legal peril for people in marginalized communities.

The letter also notes that as the coronavirus has spread across the nation, comparisons have been made to the battle against HIV.

“Since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, about 700,000 people in the United States have died as a result of complications with AIDS, and currently over 1.1 million people in the United States are living with HIV,” the letter states. “However, based on over 30 years of experience we are saving more lives and closer to ending the HIV epidemic than ever before; with innovative drug development, groundbreaking preventive measures, coordinated public health responses, and federal government leadership, the community has built a playbook of best practices that can be applied beyond HIV.”

The letter then delves into more specifics about why each of the four recommendations is critical, before concluding: “The White House Coronavirus Task Force should use the lessons learned in our fight against HIV, viral hepatitis, STDs and TB to inform our nation’s response to COVID-19 testing, surveillance and contact tracing must be adequately expanded before the United States goes back to work. If not, we may be stuck in a cycle of on-again off-again social distancing, continued preventable deaths, and further disruption as a result of this terrible disease.”

You can read and download a PDF of the entire letter here.

In related news, keep in mind that novel coronavirus guidance and concerns for unique populations may vary. For example, see “3 Reasons COVID-19 Poses a Higher Risk for the LGBTQ Population,” “UPDATED: What People With Liver Disease Need to Know About the New Coronavirus” and similar articles regarding people with HIV and people with cancer.

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