AIDS Leaders Ask Southern Governors to Enact Shelter-in-Place Mandates

Here's why they claim the preventive measure against COVID-19 will save lives, notably of people with HIV.

April 2, 2020 By Trent Straube

A group of HIV leaders in the South is urging all governors in the region to issue statewide shelter-in-place mandates to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the potentially fatal disease caused by the novel coronavirus. The call to action was issued by the Southern AIDS Coalition (SAC), a group of advocates from business, government and community groups working together to fight the HIV epidemic in the South.

"This preventive measure will save lives, especially those who are most medically or socially fragile," said the coalition's executive director Derick B. Wilson in an SAC blog post. He cited three reasons why such mandates are important for the region:

- lack of access to the number of tests needed to fully understand the epidemiological impact of COVID-19;
- lack of personal protective equipment (PPE);
- risk of crashing overburdened and fragile hospital systems.

SAC points out that the South has the highest number of HIV cases in the nation and that people with HIV may be at a heightened risk of death from COVID-19, particularly if they don't have access to health care.

To learn more about HIV and COVID-19, read "UPDATED: What People With HIV Need to Know About the New Coronavirus."

Adding to the health challenges in the South, the region has seen the closure of numerous rural hospitals—119 have shuttered in the past decade alone. This includes 20 in Texas and 13 in Tennessee, SAC notes.

On Tuesday, April 1, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis issued a statewide stay-at-home order. On that date, Florida already had 6,741 cases of COVID-19 and 85 deaths, according to Slate.com. Other governors and mayors have issued similar mandates, while some take different approaches, such as Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, who has requested that residents not meet in groups larger than 10 and who declared Sunday a Special Day of Prayer for seeking God's love, mercy and wisdom.

The Slate article, "Is the South Ready for the Coronavirus?," offers a state-by-state roundup of COVID-19 cases and deaths along with a summary of how each state is responding to the pandemic.

Meanwhile, SAC offers its expertise in dealing with health crises. "Public health strategies are effective when we are proactive, grounded and committed to working collaboratively," Wilson said in the SAC statement. "We are willing to assist with strategizing around overcoming challenges related to testing, community impact, prevention supplies and treatment needs of people impacted by COVID-19 throughout the South."

Go to poz.com/tag/coronavirus for our continuing coverage of COVID-19.

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