COVID-19: Protecting the Grandparents
By Dr. Michele Dikkers, Chair of Clayton County Board of Health

I was an adult before my grandparents passed away, I even had the privilege to know my great grandmother. To be in your 30’s and have the opportunity to know them as an adult, is a gift.

My great grandmother was born in 1900 and died in 1998. I often marveled at all of the things she had seen in her lifetime. Invention of the car in 1900, airplanes that fly across the country and oceans to man landing and walking on the moon. Telephone, party lines with operators to cell phones. Calculators to computers that took up a whole room, to laptops. Inventions of radios, inventions of TV, black and white to color.

World War 1 started when she was 14. The Spanish flu hit as she was just starting to be an adult, she was 18. There were the roaring 20’s, and then, as she was in the middle of starting and raising a family, The Great Depression hit (age 29). At 39 World War II started. Along with it came food rationing, gasoline rationing, and as much metal as possible went to the war effort for ammunition, tanks and aircrafts. Cooking grease was even donated for explosives. There were smallpox and polio epidemics. The Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

79% of all COVID-19 cases are under the age of 65, while 82% of all COVID-19 deaths are over the age of 65. The current guidelines encourage those over the age of 65 to stay home if they don’t need to leave their home. But of course, they do need to leave their homes. They need to go shopping. They need to go to doctor appointments. They need to receive essential cares. And remember, many of them still work. In order to perform these essential functions, they will likely have to come into contact with someone under the age of 65.

By following the current guidelines of physical distancing, staying at home when we are sick, avoiding putting ourselves in high risk situations and wearing masks, we can avoid passing the disease on to someone that is over the age of 65. Many of those over the age of 65 are grandparents. I learned early on, that my grandparents taught me a lot. I treasure every year I had with them. Preventing those grandparents and great grandparents from getting COVID-19, allows them to pass on wisdom, stories and love to a generation that needs it.

So, as restrictions continue to be lifted, and we learn how to live with this virus, we all have a responsibility to make good decisions. We have to decide what is right for each of us but should not lose sight that those decisions could affect others, even those we love.

After all, considering everything they went through in the 20th century, I think we can survive physical distancing and masks. We may even owe it to them.

We are in this together.