COVID-19: The First 100 Days
By Dr. Michele Dikkers, Chair of Clayton County Board of Health

We celebrate and reflect on the first 100 days frequently. The first 100 days of the presidency, the fiscal year, the school year. We review what has been done and where do we go from here.

The first 100 days of COVID-19 has left us with 100,000 deaths. That’s 1,000 deaths per day in our country. During World War II, America experienced 100,000 military deaths per year (400,000 over the 4-year involvement).

In the medical world, we have learned much about COVID-19, and yet very little. We have learned how much is not known about it. We know it is a viral infection. It attacks our respiratory system. It attacks all ages and ethnicities. The infection does not respond to traditional treatments of respiratory illnesses. It affects the lungs differently. Like many viruses, it has to “run its course”. However, the COVID-19 course is much more complicated and grueling.

The supportive care typically given in respiratory distress cases, does not seem to be as effective, and all that has been known about using ventilators does not necessarily work with this disease. It has been frustrating for lung specialists to learn that the normal treatment plans do not work, and they are working hard on developing new courses of treatment. Multiple drug regimens have been tried, without much success. But scientists and doctors around the world are dogged. They will not quit until they find an answer or a treatment plan, but it will take more than 100 days.

There are those that say, “It’s just like influenza”. Per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, in a typical year our country will see 30-50,000 deaths from influenza. Iowa saw 100 influenza deaths last year according to the Iowa Department of Public Health, we have seen nearly 500 COVID-19 deaths in Iowa this first 100 days.

As with most illnesses, the less you are exposed to it, the less your risk of becoming ill with it.

The New England Journal of Medicine published an article stating that the coronavirus may stay in the air for three hours, however, the most contagious period is when in contact with the “larger” particles or viral load, of the illness. The load decreases with time. Less virus released into the air means less risk of contact with it and less risk of illness. Hence, masks being worn decrease the risk of causing illness.

The Journal also reported that the virus can live on surfaces like plastic and stainless steel, for up to 3 days. Cardboard, up to 24 hours. But, just as with air particles, the more time that passes, the less virus is present. Also, with routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces, COVID-19 can be killed and removed. All it takes is soapy water or an EPA approved household cleaner.
What will our next 100 days look like?

We have been fortunate in Iowa, our numbers, in comparison to other states, have been low. I like to think it is because we have had the luxury of learning from others.

In the first 100 days we have learned that wearing a mask, cleaning surfaces frequently and avoiding crowds is valuable in preventing the spread of COVID-19. These are simple tasks that can protect many.

As restrictions are being lifted, you can be confident that clinics and hospitals are following these guidelines to ensure your safety as you return to them for your healthcare needs.

What will the next 100 days say about us?

We are in this together.