Social Distancing Policies & COVID-19
April 2, 2020

Strong policies are essential to maintain the physical distance recommended by public health and medical professionals, including stay at home orders, closure of non-essential businesses, and public messaging about the importance of physical distance to prevent exposure to the new coronavirus. These measures will be much more effective at slowing the spread of the virus the sooner they are implemented.

Compliance with the White House’s social distancing guidelines is uneven across the country, and stronger federal and/or state and local policies are needed to help increase compliance. The Kaiser Family Foundation tracks state actions related to social distancing. IDSA and HIVMA have created an action alert to email or tweet governors who have not yet taken strong actions.

Slowing the Spread of COVID-19

Without stronger physician distancing measures across the country, we risk faster spread of disease, overwhelming health care settings that continue to lack essential equipment, and deaths that could have been prevented. Educating the public about the risks of COVID-19 infection is critical now. While older people and individuals with underlying conditions are at greatest risk, even young, healthy people are becoming seriously ill and dying from COVID-19.

Experts predict that even if every state implements stronger social and physical distancing measures the number of deaths caused by the virus could reach more than 2600 per day by April 16. You can visit COVIDActNow to see what is at stake for each state if we do not put in place more restrictive measures.

The Role of Social Distancing in Controlling Past Outbreaks & Pandemics

Physical and social distancing measures have helped control other outbreaks and pandemics and must be part of our toolbox now to control this deadly virus.

- An estimated 675,000 deaths in the U.S. can be attributed to the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic that claimed about 500 million lives worldwide. The U.S. cities that implemented social distancing measures early and implemented multiple measures, such as school closure and a ban on public gatherings, had lower death rates.¹
- More recently, the decrease in cases during the first wave of the H1N1 epidemic in Mexico coincided with government social distancing policies and school closures.²
- Simultaneous introduction of a variety of social distancing/hygiene measures were associated with dramatic declines in new SARS cases in 2003.³

---

² Herrera-Valdez MA, Cruz-Aponte M, Castillo-Chavez C. Multiple outbreaks for the same pandemic: Local transportation and social distancing explain the different “waves” of a-H1N1PSM cases observed in Mexico during 2009. Mathematical Biosciences and Engineering. January 2011. doi: 10.3934/mbe.2011.8.21