

April 15, 2020 | Mayor Adrian O. Mapp, Live Facebook Q&A

1. *What is causing the daily increase in Plainfield COVID-19 cases compared to other towns? The communication of urgency to shelter in place has not seemed to change, the issue seems to be more complex in nature. Is consideration being given to a multifaceted solution to decrease COVID-19 cases?*

The increase in number of cases in Plainfield is not unlike the increase in cases in other parts of the county or in other parts of the state. It is simply a factor of transparency and we are reporting our numbers on a daily basis. We continue to beat the drum each and every day to get people to adhere to the social distancing and hygiene protocols and all of the recommendations that have been made. We have our first responders out on a daily basis, mainly our police officers, and to some extent, our firefighters, who are ringing the alarm bells across our city, asking our residents to stay home. But what we are going to be doing differently is bringing a test site here to Plainfield because we want to know what the real numbers are, and I know that some of you hate just as I do seeing these numbers grow on a daily basis, but I think we would be better off as a community if we were to get the facts and if we were to know the true gravity of the situation as it exists here in Plainfield. That is why we will be bringing a test site to Plainfield between Saturday and this coming Monday.

2. *After the COVID-19, what is the protocol? I have a friend who went to Medemerge and the doctor told him he had COVID-19. He's been at home for more than 10 days feeling horrible because the hospital refuses to treat him. How will he know when the virus is out of his system?*

Director of Health and Social Services, Shep Brown: Normally, they would be told by their physicians to stay home for 14 days.

Mayor Mapp: We are going to do all that we can to follow up with individuals who have tested positive. We will pay very close attention to the contact tracing so that we can get our arms around as many people who have been touched by this virus as possible so we don't have repeat cases on numbers when the curve begins to flatten. We don't want to see it rise again. Our health department will pay very close attention to this pandemic even after our country reopens. We will not be ignoring signs that ought to be indications of there being an issue.

3. *People are not taking this seriously. People are getting their hair and nails done, people are going to their homes for these services. People are still working even if they feel sick, it's just not being taken seriously.*

Unfortunately, some people think that they are invincible. Unfortunately, some people don't realize the harm they are doing to themselves when they expose their families as a result of not practicing social distancing and everyone is experiencing hardships at this time, but we should not allow those hardships to cause us to put the health and wellbeing of our families at risk.

Police Director, Lisa Burgess: If there is a situation that someone is aware of, they can give the police department a call and give us that info. We are going around to businesses and making sure they are adhering to the governor's executive order. It's a bit harder to do that from someone's home, but whatever info you can share with us, we will make an attempt to look into that.

4. *Have you received any volunteers to date for the COVID-19 testing site?*

Yes, I am pleased to report to you that we've had a very good response to the call we've put out for volunteers. We have a number of clinicians which includes doctors, nurses, EMTs, both active and retired, and so, our call for volunteers has been very successful and I am sure that the list will grow.

5. *There's a lot of homelessness in Plainfield that plays a big part in the spread, because all over they're touching everything. Why don't you power wash the streets, the houses, apartments, stores, etc.? It might make a big difference because the landlords are doing it.*

We have been fortunate so far that we have had a lot of rain. Nature has taken its course and has been helping us in terms of keeping our streets and open areas clean. However, I must add, we've also been using our fire department and department of public works to sanitize a number of public areas especially our bus stops where people have to congregate in order to get on the bus. We've also sanitized our public benches and train stations. So, we've done some sanitizing of a number of public spaces across the city, but at this time, we don't have a plan to go down every street in Plainfield and spray them down with any sanitizing materials. But we will also be following up with businesses to get them to do what they must.

6. *Are the police enforcing the lockdown, if so, how?*

Police Director, Lisa Burgess: Yes, the police department is doing enforcement based on going out and getting the information out to the public about the stay at home order by the governor. We will continue to reinforce that message out to the community. If at any time we have to continue to frequently send the message to the same individuals and can confirm that they're not out for an essential purpose, then we can get what we need to be able to issue some instance to the public. We're don't want to go that far because we'd like citizens to comply since this is for their health and welfare. We will continue to share the robocalls and PSAs through our intercom systems, and we're passing out flyers so people will understand that this is for their benefit. If any citizens see individuals congregating, please give us a call. We will come out and move them along. This is something we have to do and work together at. We would like for people to adhere to the order and not issue tickets which will be costly to the public in such a difficult moment.

Mayor Mapp: Don't be surprised if in the coming days you see drones flying overhead reinforcing the stay at home message and encouraging people to practice proper hygienic behavior. All the things we know will make a difference in slowing the spread of the virus.

- 7. I'm concerned about someone who tested positive and followed quarantine practice, then by chance after 30 days was tested again and came back positive. It never went anywhere. What if this person went back into population? This is a major issue. How many have returned back to the community and are still positive?*

Some of us were led to believe that if you had the virus and if you go through the quarantine period, that you're not likely to get the virus again. And I think this deserves a lot of follow up from the City and from the health department as well as people at the state and at the CDC.

Director of Health and Social Services, Shep Brown: One of the things that we have discovered with this virus is there's a lot that we simply do not know. And some of it is around how people are tested positive the first time. They quarantine and they come out and they are tested positive again. While this is not the norm, there have been situations and cases of this happening. The recommendation again is that they remain in quarantine. Please call the department of health if this is a Plainfielder, though we probably already know. But these are limited situations where people do test positive the second time.

- 8. Where can we take the COVID-19 test and what will be the cost?*

Currently if you are a Union County resident, you can be tested at the only test site that is in Union County at this moment in time, at Kean University on Morris avenue. There is no cost to get tested. It is free of charge. We are working on bringing a test site to Plainfield, and that will happen. The question is will it happen as early as this Saturday as we first announced or delayed by a day or two. This site will be here for the convenience of Plainfield residents especially those who are not able to get to Kean university. More importantly, this test site will be a walk-up test site. You will not need to use your car.

- 9. Will the county be providing any of the funding for the Plainfield test site?*

The county will be picking up almost 100% of the Plainfield testing site. However, there will be a cost to Plainfield which is the use of Plainfield officers to help with traffic control, crowd control, as well as some of our personnel who will be at the site. For example, our OEM coordinator will be present. Any number of us will be present there, so that's the only cost to our city right now. But the county will fund the operation of the Plainfield test site, and we are very blessed to have some 17 clinicians who have volunteered their time to staff this test site.

10. *How will the city support people without jobs after 30 days so they can cover their leasing, light, rent, etc.?*

First, I must say that with or without this crisis we're facing, our Plainfield action services does have funds that we provide to people that are really in need such as paying an electric bill or some short-term relocation situation. So I would recommend first calling Plainfield Action Services to find out if there are any resources presently available that could help in desperate situations, but more than that, is that we have created a Plainfield COVID-19 relief fund for the purpose of assembling these resources, financial resources in particular. We are accepting donations of material goods as well (PPEs, face masks, gloves, etc.) but our primary focus right now with this Plainfield COVID-19 relief fund is to collect significant funds of money by way of donations to be able to provide some financial and economic relief to the people of Plainfield and small businesses that are having very difficult times staying on top of their dues.

11. *Are there any criteria for getting tested that you can share at this time? Are you able to share where the site might be located?*

Director of Health and Social Services, Shep Brown: The criteria are the same that you would find at any other testing site. You will call a telemedicine line to get accessed by a medical practitioner first, and once you've been assessed and fit the criteria, you will be given an appointment to begin the process of testing.

Mayor Mapp: Regarding the location of the test site, we have not settled on the exact location. It can be at the Plainfield High School, it could be at our fourth street parking lot which is owned by Plainfield, it could be at the Plainfield health center, or it could be a mobile unit that is stationed at park Madison. We do not know the exact location at this time. That is still being worked out. We are working on getting it located centrally to most of our residents so that people could easily walk from any corner of the city to the location.

12. *Does citizenship status matter in regards to COVID-19 relief and help?*

I can tell you that citizenship does not matter, just like it doesn't matter with who gets the virus and who doesn't. There are a number of undocumented people in our city and nation who are paying taxes and who are a part of the drivers in economy. Even if people are undocumented, they are still participating in the economy in every possible way, and under my watch, they will not be left behind.

13. *I have seen a huge spike in the number of seniors affected in nursing homes. Lots of workers and families then get infected. What is being done to make sure they're not spreading the virus; is there enough protective gear?*

Director of Health and Social Services, Shep Brown: One of the challenges that the state is having is really monitoring and checking in on the nursing homes. Every nursing home in the state has cases and they are looking into making sure there is enough staff and PPEs. All of this is being looked into because it is a public health issue, especially in nursing homes.

Director of Police, Lisa Burgess: In regards to the residential home like the Park Hotel, we have been educating them there. Our officers were there yesterday to supply them with masks. We also educated the staff there in regards to controlling the virus if it were to affect that particular location and keeping the residents safe there as well. As far as the nursing homes, I know that our OEM has been in constant contact with them.

14. What is your opinion in regards to opening up business as the president is looking to do?

I know how much the economy is hurting. I think we all know that; we're hurting here in Plainfield. Every city across these United States is hurting. But what we must be guided by, and I am hoping that our president and our governors across the country would not rush to try to reopen the country in a time when the virus is still so prevalent across the United States, and we here in Plainfield are seeing our number of positives rise on a daily basis. I hope that there would be no rush to reopen in the country until we have our hands firmly around this virus in a way that would suggest to us that we have passed the worst and that we are not in danger of seeing the virus reoccur to the point where we have mass infections that would result in a countless loss of lives. We have to be very careful and patient. We must not and should not rush to reopen the country until we are in the position to make an informed decision based on health data from professionals and not from data on politicians.

15. Does the city have any plans to make masks available for free or to low cost to residents?

Yes, we do. We are concerned about some of the people that we still see walking without masks as they go about their necessary business. And we are concerned about our homeless population. We are concerned in general about anyone who is seen without a mask, and so we intend to make some masks available to those who need them and we do intend to go from corner to corner and begin a distribution of masks to individuals who are in need. We hope we can begin that kind of distribution within the next 48 hours.

16. Can we limit transportation services?

At our municipal level, we are not able to limit transportation. We do not own any transportation resources beyond the buses that we use for our seniors. Any decision on that will come from our governor, and he has already imposed certain restrictions on buses and trains and I believe he will continue to look at that closely to see whether or not it's working.

17. *Do our police have all the protective gear that they need?*

Police Director, Lisa Burgess: The police department does have a decent amount of protective equipment at this point. We are still accepting donations as we don't know how long we're going to be in this situation. We would appreciate donations from the community, but for now we are doing pretty well with our PPE gear.

18. *Elizabeth is providing UEZ relief for businesses. Is Plainfield planning something similar for UEZ businesses?*

Economic Development Director, Valerie Jackson: Plainfield is rolling out a program to assist small businesses utilizing UEZ funds. We will be taking that program to council for approval at the May council meeting.

Mayor Mapp: With the approval of the council, the answer is yes.

19. *Are we going to establish a homeless shelter, in particular for inmates that are being released from jails who are sheltering in abandoned buildings because their families are unwilling to provide them with shelter for fears of being infected?*

The City of Plainfield does not have a location where the homeless can be housed. At this time, that is beyond our capacity to do. There's no housing that the city owns in Plainfield that can be used for such a purpose.

Director of Health and Social Services, Shep Brown: We are working in the county to try to figure this out. We are looking for a solution for this.

20. *Is there a demographic chart/map to know where the infected people are?*

Director of Health and Social Services, Shep Brown: There is no map to highlight where the cases are. It is in every ward, and that's where we stand right now.

21. *Will there be heroes pay for fire, police, DPW and PMUA workers?*

At this time, we don't have any plans or resources that can be used for that purpose. I can tell you that I wrote a 650-word guest editorial to one of the major news organizations with a suggestion for a GI bill of rights for first responders. Look out for that editorial. I am hoping they will pick it up and residents will get to see my suggestion for first responders.

22. *What is the phone number for COVID-19 assistance?*

We have not yet established a phone number or application form. We will put those pieces in place and communicate it publicly to everyone.

23. *Are we able to provide transportation assistance for those seeking shelter in Elizabeth?*

Director of Health and Social Services, Shep Brown: Not currently, but whatever programs that we can get people into we will certainly do that and figure it out.

24. *How many times should people go out for food? Maybe there should be a limit on visits. It makes no sense for people to be hanging around.*

I agree with that person, however, that all falls under the charge of the governor. Until he imposes that kind of restriction limiting visits to stores, we cannot do anything at the municipal level about that. It's up to the governor, and his executive order lists food establishments and grocery stores as essential.

Police Director, Lisa Burgess: I would like to say to everyone that's listening, the more that you go out, the more you are putting yourselves and your families at risk. The more that you can limit going out for food and medicine, or essential needs, it will be best for all to limit those times because you don't know what you're encountering when you're in those grocery stores. I say that to the families who have younger adults or young children, it's the same when they go to schools, playing ball, these are things that are bringing more risks to your families. I'm appealing to everyone to adhere to the governor's executive order and limit the time you go out for essential services.

25. *How many nursing homes does Plainfield have and the number of long-term health facilities?*

Director of Health and Social Services, Shep Brown: There are 3 long-term care facilities in Plainfield.

26. *How many residents are currently hospitalized? Are we informed of local hospital capacity constraints?*

Director of Health and Social Services, Shep Brown: Unfortunately, we're not told of the hospital capacity.

Mayor Mapp: Although we'd love to give you granular details like with the governor, we don't have the same information that the governor has.

27. *Do babies need to use masks if they go to the doctor for vaccinations?*

Babies are people too! And I would hope that any parent would make sure that their babies are covered up when exposed to the public.

28. *Will you share the editorial you wrote with Plainfield residents?*

The answer is that news organizations can not be preempted, if you do, your editorial may never see the light of day. I will not until I have a formed answer from the organization that I have reached out to. So, not at this time.

29. *How often will these town halls be held? I find this very informative way to reach out to Plainfield residents.*

We intend to continue these weekly conversations with the residents of our great city of Plainfield, and when there is a need for the frequency to change we will make the appropriate adjustment either more or less frequently, but we do intend to continue speaking to our residents on a regular basis.

30. *If conditions continue, is the city prepared to forego a tax sale this year?*

The city will always be guided by state statutes, but we will also be guided by the city's needs. These are difficult times, yet the city still needs to provide resources to its residents. We still have to clean the streets, pick up the garbage, and do all of the things a municipality is responsible for delivering by way of services to its residents. And so, even though these are tough times, the city must still generate revenues in order to have the cash flow to pay its bills and provide the services. We will do only what the state directs us to do in terms of any modification of the things we do on a daily basis, weekly or monthly, to generate the revenue that we need to keep the city afloat.

31. *In regards to the quarantine with children in the house, does the city have any ideas on activities with police or firefighters going through the streets saying hello, singing, or sending a motivational message to the children?*

It is always good when our kids can hear from our bravest and finest. That's always a wonderful thing. But the problem that that poses, is the kids we want to sing to are supposed to be at home in the house. I am not sure how we can do that and I don't know that our police officers and firefighters are not doing it to the extent that they can.

Police Director, Lisa Burgess: I actually think that's an excellent idea. I think that the only concern I have is that it brings people out. If we were to come up with something like that, we would have to think of something creative.

