

Local leaders, professionals discuss COVID-19 risk

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few weeks that reopening this state – taking New York off the “PAUSE” he placed it on to control the outbreak – is akin to releasing pressure in a valve. If it is done too fast, the pipe will burst – or, in this case, if he reopens certain popular destinations while others remain closed, an influx of people will descend on that location, potentially bringing the coronavirus with them.

Though the Village of Lewiston, officially, has had less than 10 positive COVID-19 cases, it's safe to say not everyone visiting the business district this past weekend was a resident.

Groups of people gathered together – some were families whose members are living together in quarantine. Though they pose no additional risk to themselves by assembling in public, Cuomo said they can still infect other people.

Transference to Inanimate Objects

“Social distancing” and “physical distancing” are terms everyone has heard on loop for almost two months. This practice has been called the best way to avoid infecting another person (or getting infected, for that matter).

But what is the risk of spreading coronavirus to another person by means of an inanimate object?

“What happens to you is dependent on what I do, and how I act,” Cuomo said. “I don't wear a mask. I sneeze on a park bench, you walk up two minutes later and sit down on the park bench – oh, by the way, you walk up a half an hour later, maybe, and sit on the park bench; and you put your hand down, and then you wipe your face. Now you have a problem – because of me. That's why the mask wearing (matters).”

Niagara Frontier Publications asked Niagara County Public Health Director Daniel Stapleton about transference.

“It depends on what the inanimate object is. That's the first thing,” he said Monday. “So, if it's a hard surface – and I'm not an expert on this, on virology, but I believe that, a hard surface, it's going to stay on there, inside a house with perfect conditions, for let's say as much as 72 hours; 48 to 72 hours.

“But when you go outside, the virulence of the virus is much, much less. And there has been anecdotal evidence to suggest that the half-life of this virus is cut down to only a few minutes when it's in direct sunlight.

“So, it depends on where it is: If it's in a controlled environment inside on a hard object, it might



Both DiMino Tops and the Lewiston Police Department have posted signs encouraging people to wear masks.

be as much as 48-72 hours; but if it's outside, it might be as little as a few minutes. It really depends on the conditions you're dealing with, on how long the virus will remain active and pose a danger. But typically, outside is much, much less. And in direct sunlight, like I said, anecdotally, it's showing that the half-life is much, much shorter.”

Still, he said that doesn't mean masks are optional.

“I went for a walk yesterday along the canal on a walking path, my wife and I. We did not have masks on. But I had a mask in my pocket,” Stapleton said. “If I'm going to be near a group – we weren't – and most people are smart enough now – but somebody's riding a bike, you're not gonna be wearing a mask. For one thing, it's hard to breathe. But if you're walking, just two people – a member of your family, then I don't see the need for a mask.

“But, but, you should have a mask handy. And also, if you're going to be closer than six feet with people, you should be wearing a mask. So, it depends on the environment that you're in, depends on the activity you're doing.

“Most people are able to tell the distance of six foot. And, if you're outside, breeze blowing and you're not in a large crowd, then I think the risk is much, much less. But if you're in a crowded area, you're on the beach, and there's 20 people around, and they're not using physical distancing, then that's when you're less protected.

“So, most of it's common sense. You're closer than six feet, then you should be wearing a mask. And most people have access to masks and have them. I think it's all using common sense of putting the mask on when you're



closer to six feet with somebody that you don't necessarily know. A family member you share a home with, they're not expected to wear a mask.”

What Can Be Done?

Seeing someone waiting outside for a food order, in a line with other people, without a mask, raises the question as to whether business owners should insist customers are covered.

“Businesses can decide who they're going to serve. It's completely their choice. But it's not difficult to wear a mask when you're waiting in line for food. It's not difficult to make sure you have six feet between you and another person,” Stapleton said.

If going inside, He noted, “You wear your mask, because you'll be closer; because you're paying somebody.”

He explained, “We pick up food. A person at the restaurant brings it out your door and puts it in your back seat. I had a mask on. I don't want to put them at risk. They had a mask on, too.

“I think a lot of it is people know what the rules are – it's not a big shock to them – and businesses make the decision. I do not tell businesses what they need to do. I tell businesses these are the precautions you need to take. Businesses should worry about protecting their customers because,

if they don't, they won't have those customers for long. So, they use common sense, and they want to protect themselves, their staff, as well as their customers.”

Lewiston Tops supermarket owner Anthony DiMino said, “We've had some complaints that customers are coming in without a mask.

“It's a slippery slope. We have signs up and stating that we should have masks on; but it's becoming more and more of a problem if someone comes without a mask.”

DiMino said it's hard to deny someone the right to purchase food.

“We've asked people to leave if they do not have a mask. We started that yesterday. ... The news today, there's two or three states that are now stating that they don't need to put on masks. So, it's a slippery slope. I mean, if you can't breathe and you can't wear a mask, are you going to tell that person they can't shop – if they actually need food? I don't know.

“So, right now, we're asking people to have a mask on.”

He explained, “We really don't have the personnel to have someone out like they do at Home Depot. Bring in one person at a time and, if they don't have a mask, they're turned away. We just don't have enough help to do that.

We're short on help, as it is.

“If we see somebody, we tell them, ‘You need to put a mask on.’ And we're asking them to leave. But that's really not what we should be doing.”

New York executive order 202.16 “directs employers to provide essential workers with masks free of charge to wear when interacting with the public.”

Enforcement Options

Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce President Jennifer Pauly said, “Because (Sunday) was a beautiful day, we probably received 15 private messages on all of our social media regarding people out walking, and people upset about people not wearing masks.”

Village of Lewiston Mayor Anne Welch said, “I got calls on (Sunday's gatherings), too, because people were down at the waterfront without masks on. I went down and they seemed to be pretty much social distancing. But people were upset that they were out. Also through Artpark (State Park), people were not wearing masks.

“I get it, that when they're out and they're just with their family, I guess that they don't need to wear a mask – and for a beautiful day, you really don't want to be breathing through a mask.

“I don't know how to police it. I mean, there's just so many people. When they go into stores, they're wearing masks, but outside they're not.”

Cuomo explained, “I've said to all the local government heads, enforce it. Enforce it. Because it's not only wrong, it's a public health risk. It really is such a little thing to ask of people at a time when people are doing so much.”

He reiterated the point Monday. “Local governments have the ability to enforce and to penalize – that's up to local governments. But do I think local government should be enforcing it, and should there be sanctions? Yes. Yes. Because it is a public health emergency,” he said. “You know, this is not just, ‘Do me a favor.’ This is a public health emergency.

“And it's a statewide order that I put in place, that I'm proud of, and local governments have the responsibility to enforce it. And part of their right, their legal right, is they can have a penalty or a sanction that they impose. So, Rochester can have one penalty – it can be appropriate to the community. New York City's in a different situation. But yeah, I think local government should enforce it, and I think there should be a penalty – because you could literally kill someone. You could literally kill someone because you didn't want to wear a mask. I mean, how cruel and irresponsible would that be?”

Lewiston Police Department Chief Frank Previte said his officers cannot practically monitor
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