

Message from the Mayor, April 17, 2020

Pandemic touches lives in large and small ways

It was a week for new developments – large and small – in the war against the coronavirus pandemic.

New Jersey extended the school closing date at least through May 20 and joined with five other East Coast states to synchronize its ultimate reopening plans when conditions allow.

Atlantic Health System, in the type of good news that often gets overlooked in a crises, announced on Thursday that 1,117 patients had transitioned to recovery or had been discharged from its hospitals, including Morristown and Overlook locally.

Chatham Township announced that our Regional Health Officer has approved opening the Tanglewood Compost Area starting next Saturday, April 25, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The announcement was timed to get past one more weekend of what the state expects to be still-climbing Covid-19 test results, and to let residents know that the results of their yard cleanup this weekend can be disposed of on future Saturdays.

The Health Officer is also agreeable to reopening the Recycling Center when conditions allow and appropriate procedures are in place. The opening date for the Recycling Center has not yet been announced.

The latest test results for Chatham Township underscore the seriousness of the ongoing pandemic.

Chatham Township had three new confirmed cases of Covid-19 on Thursday, according to the Regional Health Department. These latest numbers bring the Township's total to 87 cases, with no new cases at any of the longterm care facilities in the Township.

However, in a somber update of data newly available through the state reporting system, the Regional Health Department announced for the first time that 8 people from the Township have died of Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic. These are the first official reports of any Covid-19-related deaths of Township residents.

Of the 87 total confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the Township, a total of 59 – or more than two-thirds – were residents of longterm care facilities, underscoring the vulnerability of people who are older or have underlying health conditions.

The actual number of Covid-19 cases in any municipality is understood to be significantly larger than the number of positive test results since many people who show only minor symptoms are never tested, and the results of those who are tested often are not entered into the state reporting system for several days.

In addition, the Health Department reports that the addresses of as many as 8 of Chatham Township's 87 total – including 4 employees of a local longterm care facility – are still under investigation and may eventually be attributed to an actual residence in another municipality.

Regional Health Officials report that they and the state Department of Health continue to work with all longterm care facilities to review emergency plans, staffing levels and critical procedures.

The Regional Health Department has reached out to colleges and universities that have nursing programs – including Fairleigh Dickinson, Saint Elizabeths and Kean – to determine the availability of 4th year nursing students who can function as a nurse during this outbreak and for other nursing students to function in a helping capacity in some way other than a licensed nurse. Anyone with nursing credentials or experience is invited to contact the Regional Health Department based in Bloomfield.

Our thoughts and prayers are with all the families that have been touched by the coronavirus pandemic, especially those families who are separated from their elderly loved ones at one of our longterm care facilities.

Health officials predict that the Coronavirus pandemic in New Jersey could begin to level off soon, but is expected to get worse before it gets better. The best advice anyone can follow is to act as though they themselves, and anyone they meet, has been exposed to the coronavirus and could potentially be contagious.

The message for all of us to take from these latest numbers is that the coronavirus pandemic is far from over; that the most vulnerable among us continue to be the elderly and those with underlying health issues; and that any of us can be infected and risk infecting others, even if we don't show any symptoms ourselves.

The most important guidance continues to be to stay home as much as possible; to limit outdoor activities to essential trips and exercise, and to maintain a safe social distance of six feet from anyone who is not a member of your immediate household. The CDC recommends that everyone wear a face mask when among other people.

Please continue to follow the social distancing and stay-at-home guidelines that are so important to protect our community. The faster we can control this pandemic, the faster we can reduce these painful restrictions.

Be careful and stay healthy.

Michael Kelly

Chatham Township Mayor