Subject: Reimpose Aggressive Social Distancing Measures Now

To: Governor Andrew Cuomo, Mayor Bill de Blasio, Speaker Corey Johnson, Commissioner Howard A. Zucker, and Commissioner Dave A. Chokshi,

We are writing as members of the COVID-19 Working Group-NY (CWG-NY), a coalition of healthcare professionals, scientists, social workers, community workers, activists, and epidemiologists committed to a rapid and community-oriented response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For a second time this year, we implore the City to take immediate, decisive steps to contain the spread of SARS-CoV-2, before we lose another critical opportunity to prevent the deaths of thousands of New Yorkers from COVID-19.

On Wednesday, Governor Cuomo announced new restrictions to curb and reverse the alarming rise in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations across New York State, at a time of record numbers of new COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths across the country. These statewide restrictions include a 10-person limit for private indoor and outdoor gatherings and a 10 p.m. closing time for all gyms, bars, and restaurants. The responsibility for enforcing these restrictions will lie with local governments and implementation begins Friday, November 13th.

Mayor de Blasio has signaled that the new statewide restrictions will be enforced in NYC, with Staten Island declared a yellow zone with additional restrictions. However, we do not believe these measures are remotely adequate to reverse the tide of new infections in the City, which is no longer confined to local hotspots. The citywide positive testing rate has reached a seven-day average of 2.52 percent and is rising daily. The City has pledged to invoke additional measures, such as school closures, when the seven-day positivity rate reaches 3%. We believe, however, that it is unwise to wait until we reach that point to take necessary actions to stop the steady increase we are seeing now.

As we warned in our previous letter, non-pharmaceutical interventions can only save lives and preserve hospital capacity if the City acts early. If we wait too long to implement these interventions, as the City did in March, we will suffer the same economic and social costs, but many more New Yorkers will die.

Right now, the City still has ample hospital capacity and robust laboratory testing capacity. We strongly urge City and State leadership to act decisively now, rather than waiting for the inevitable rise in avoidable hospitalizations and deaths before taking appropriate action.
to successfully fight back the next wave. Recent epidemiological\textsuperscript{1,2} and modeling\textsuperscript{3} studies have shown that indoor dining, gyms, and houses of worship play a disproportionately large role in driving up SARS-CoV-2 infection rates. Given the rapidly accelerating epidemic in New York City, we call on Governor Cuomo, Mayor de Blasio, the NYS Department of Health, and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to immediately implement Citywide interventions. At minimum:

- Strongly encourage all non-essential personnel to work from home;
- Close all gyms;
- Publish and enforce DOHMH guidelines on depopulation of congregate settings, per a request sent by CWG-NY earlier this week;
- Reimplement citywide restrictions on maximum occupancy in houses of worship;
- Pause all indoor dining, as well as outside dining in enclosures that significantly restrict ventilation;
- Strongly discourage non-essential indoor gatherings of any size;
- Reinforce physical/social distancing and enforce the face covering/masking mandate in all situations where physical/social distancing is not possible;
- Enabling access to testing with the goal of doubling daily testing rates in the City;
- Explore and implement novel solutions, including self-collected specimens to reduce the long lines New Yorkers are compelled to endure to be tested for COVID-19.

City and State leadership must also put in place clear and binding thresholds, based on metrics of SARS-CoV-2 spread, that trigger the initiation and easing of these and other measures. The City should immediately devise and implement a color-coding alert system with transparent mitigation steps to stem the tide of rising infections. This transparency will enable NYC businesses and residents to anticipate change and plan for a currently uncertain future.

Earlier this year— in spite of critical and deadly political delays in scaling up aggressive physical/social distancing measures and movement restrictions – New York City residents and our health care system proved that we have the commitment and skill to bring the COVID-19 crisis under control. Our City and State governments must demonstrate that they have learned hard lessons from the traumatic early months of this pandemic. Our leaders have the power and the responsibility to act decisively now, so that we do not endure the next avoidable wave of illness and death.

Sincerely,

Housing Works
Latino Commission on AIDS
National Black Leadership Commission on Health


\textsuperscript{2} Leclerc QJ, Fuller NM, Knight LE, et al. What settings have been linked to SARS-CoV-2 transmission clusters? [version 2; peer review: 2 approved]. \textit{Wellcome Open Res} 2020, 5:83 https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.15889.2

Treatment Action Group
PrEP4All
#MEAction New York
Callen-Lorde Community Health Center


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