



AT THE FOREFRONT

UChicago Medicine

***Dr. Emily Landon speaks about COVID-19
at Illinois governor's press conference***

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University of Chicago Medicine infectious diseases expert Dr. Emily Landon spoke during the Illinois governor's COVID-19 press conference. She explained why the statewide "stay-at-home" order is crucial to protecting everyone. Here is a transcript of Dr. Landon's speech:

Good afternoon, everyone.

First of all, I want to send my sincere gratitude and support to all of the health care workers in Illinois and around the world. Despite doing our best to prepare for a respiratory virus pandemic, we now find ourselves facing a brand new virus with too little information, not enough personal protective equipment, changing protocols every single day, and no second chances.

The University of Chicago Medicine and every other hospital in the state has been and is working very closely with our public health departments. Without these partnerships with each other, and with public health, and the CDC, we could not have made it this far. And we will not get much further. And so I also express my gratitude to everyone working in public health. All of us in the field of infectious diseases and the public health community are united in our efforts and agree with this course of action. I have spoken with many of my colleagues across the city and the state.

And we all acknowledge that this is the only way forward. This virus is unforgiving. It spreads before you even know you've caught it. And it tricks you into believing that it's nothing more than a little influenza. For many of us, it may not be much more than the flu. And so it could be very confusing as to why schools are closed, restaurants are shuttered.

And now, the virus is taking what's left of our precious liberty. But the real problem is not the 80-percent who will get over this in a week. It's the 20-percent of patients, the older, those that are immunocompromised, those that have other medical problems who are going to need a bit more support—some oxygen... or maybe a ventilator... *life support...*

We do amazing things like this to save patients in our American hospitals and across the world every single day. But we can't take care of everyone at once. And we can't keep that low mortality promise if we can't provide the support that our patients need.

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Our health care system doesn't have any slack. There are no empty wards waiting for patients or nurses waiting in the wings. We barely even have enough masks for the nurses that we have. Looking back to the last time, we were—limited tools and having a dangerous infection spread quickly—was the beginning of the 1918 pandemic. Two cities in America made different choices about how to proceed and when only a few patients were affected. St. Louis shut itself down and sheltered in place. But Philadelphia went ahead with a huge parade to celebrate those going off to war. A week later, Philadelphia hospitals were overrun. And thousands were dead—many more than in St. Louis.

This is a cautionary tale for our time. Things are already tough in Illinois hospitals, including mine. There is *no* vaccine or readily available antiviral [medicine] to help stem the tide. All we have to slow the spread is social distance. And if we let every single patient with this infection infect three more people and then each of them infect two or three more people, there won't be a hospital bed when my mother can't breathe very well—or when yours is coughing too much.

So in my house, we've made a lot of sacrifices. We don't go out anymore. This is the first time I've left my house in some days, because I'm leading our efforts in emergency planning for my home. My son has traded in sports, a science conference, and the fifth grade bake sale for puzzles, e-learning, and some video chats. This isn't the life any of us expected. And certainly, there are others who will make much greater sacrifices. And there are many more disappointments to come.

This isn't going to be forever, like the governor said. It *will* last longer than any of us wanted to. But in the end, we will look back and see it as just a piece of what happened in our whole lives. And we *have* to remember that. How can soccer or a book club be so dangerous? Why ask so much of people for just a few hundred cases?

Because it's the only way to save those lives—and now is the time. Because the numbers you see today in the news are the people that got sick a week ago. And there are still people today who got sick today, who haven't even noticed that they've been sick yet. They picked up the virus, and it will take a week to see that show in our numbers. Waiting for hospitals to be overwhelmed will leave the following weeks' patients with *nowhere to go*. In short, without taking drastic measures, the healthy and optimistic among us will doom the vulnerable. We have to fight this fire before it grows too high. These extreme restrictions may seem, in the end, a little anticlimactic. Because it's really hard to feel like you're saving the world when you're watching Netflix from your couch.

But if we do this right... nothing happens. A successful shelter in place means that you're going to feel like it was all for nothing. And you'd be right. Because "nothing" means that "nothing happened to your family." And *that's* what we're going for here. Even starting now, we can't stop the cases from coming fast and furious—at least for the next couple of weeks and in the short term. But with a real commitment to sheltering in place and a whole lot of patients, we can help protect our critical workers who need to use public transportation in order to safely get from where they need to go.

We can give our factories time to ramp up production of all that Personal Protection Equipment, so that we have enough masks to last. And we can make more medications and learn more about how we could use them to help save more lives. Even a little time makes a huge difference.

It will take more than a week to start seeing the rate of increase slow down. And that's a complicated thing to say. It'll take even longer to see the rate come down, and see it slowing, and infections going down. So please—don't give up. I've lived in Illinois my entire life. And I know we'll get through this together and find a way back to the life that we used to live. Public health and hospitals have been working hard for a long time.

And now... it's *your* turn to do your part—a huge sacrifice to make, but a sacrifice that can make thousands of differences...

Maybe even a difference in your family, too.