



Macedonia Baptist Church

26 Wilson Avenue • Albany, NY 12205

Tel: (518) 489-4370 • Fax: (518) 489-3414 • www.macedoniaofalbany.org

Rev. Leonard D. Comithier Jr., Pastor

Macedonia and COVID-19

(Update #8 – April 30, 2020)

Introduction: What is the COVID-19 Workgroup Talking About?

Before jumping into this week's topics, please be aware that as of April 27th, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) added six additional symptoms that may indicate the presence of the COVID-19 virus. Initially the symptoms included fever, cough and shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. The CDC has added that the presence of at least two of the following symptoms may also be an indication of the presence of the virus: chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat and new loss of taste or smell. Symptoms may appear 2 – 14 days after exposure to the virus.

Last the week the COVID-19 Workgroup spent some time discussing where we are and what we have learned as we have worked to provide current and accurate information to you. This week the Workgroup has taken that assessment a step further and is actively reviewing all we have done in an effort to assist the Macedonia community in being informed and adopting good health and safety practices. Reviewing and documenting what we have done will create a permanent record such that in the event of another emergency we will, in essence, have a roadmap to follow. Reverend Comithier will also look to ministry leads for additional feedback at their meeting on Saturday morning.

In addition, the Workgroup is talking about testing which is in the headlines each day. We are fortunate to live in New York State where, early in the COVID-19 outbreak, the Governor made it abundantly clear that "the single most important thing we can do to combat and contain the novel coronavirus is test for it."ⁱ The Governor is now equally clear that "We [New York State] need federal support"ⁱⁱⁱ to re-open in a way that is safe for everyone. On April 26, 2020, the Governor laid out a plan for gradually re-opening the state that is based on several factors. Testing plays a significant role in that plan.

Based on CDC recommendations, once a region experiences a 14-day decline in the hospitalization rate they may begin a phased re-opening. The State is closely monitoring the hospitalization rate, *the infection rate and the number of positive antibody tests*, as well as the overall public health impact, and will make adjustments to the plan and other decisions based on these indicators.ⁱⁱⁱ

With testing being such a vital part of the plan for re-opening and finding our new normal, the COVID-19 section of this Update provides some insights on the topic.

It remains important to continue following these basic safety procedures established by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)^{iv}

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Sneeze or cough into a tissue if available or the crook of your elbow, not your hands. Toss any used tissue. Wash immediately after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Avoid touching your face, especially your mouth, nose, and eyes, with unwashed hands.
- Frequently disinfect surfaces touched including keyboards, desktops, cell phones, elevator buttons, doorknobs, handrails, and remote controls.
- Use hand sanitizer that is, at least, 60% alcohol.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has flu-like symptoms.
- Stay home if you have flu-like-symptoms.
- If you must go out, practice “social distancing” which means not being within 6 feet of another person.
- Hold any gatherings of 10 or more people virtually or not at all.

In keeping with CDC recommendations, Macedonia has livestreamed worship only at 11:00 a.m. on Sundays until further notice. The church is not open. The closing of the church also applies to Sunday School, Bible Study, New Member Classes, and all internal and external meetings, activities and events. Pastor and the Workgroup will update communications accordingly with any changes.

COVID-19: Where are we with testing?

When the word “testing” is mentioned in relation to the COVID-19 virus now, it is often difficult to understand exactly what is meant. Does “testing” refer to testing people to see whether they are currently infected with the virus? Does it mean testing people to see if they have antibodies in their system? (We talked about antibodies last week.) Does it mean testing to see whether someone who already had the virus is immune? Testing can indeed be a very confusing topic. Let’s see if we can provide some clarity.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) tells us that there are two types of COVID-19 tests: diagnostic tests and antibody blood tests (also called serologic tests).^v

1. Diagnostic tests check samples from your respiratory system (such as swabs of the inside of the nose) to tell you if you currently have an infection with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.^{vi} Diagnostic tests are for both people showing symptoms and for those who are not (asymptomatic). As of the writing of this *Update*, the availability of and eligibility for diagnostic tests in the Capital Region varies.
 - a. “In partnership with Albany Med and St. Peter’s Health Partners, New York State has opened a COVID-19 mobile testing site at The University at Albany, 1400 Washington Ave., Colonial Quad parking lot. The testing center is...open each day from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Testing is prioritized for individuals in high-risk populations. Appointments are

required and may be made by calling 888-364-3065. No walk-ins are permitted, and all patients must be in a vehicle.”^{vii}

- b. Albany Med is not currently conducting COVID-19 community testing onsite. To conserve supplies, Albany Med is only testing symptomatic Albany Med health care workers, first responders with high-risk exposure to the virus and the inpatient population at Albany Med under investigation for COVID-19.
 - c. The following link will take you to a document that lists the “Testing Sites for COVID-19” in Albany, Latham, Clifton Park, Watervliet, Saratoga Springs and Amsterdam (4/24/20). The document also provides criteria for eligibility for testing, scheduling and any additional information. <https://www.saratogacountyny.gov/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Testing-Sites.pdf>
 - d. An Online Assessment is available through the New York State website. The assessment is used as a screening tool to determine if you are eligible to be tested. If after responding to several questions you are eligible, additional directions will be provided. Click this link: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-testing>
 - e. The Governor **will issue** an Executive Order allowing pharmacists, such as CVS, to perform diagnostic tests.
2. Antibody [or serologic] blood test...checks your blood for antibodies that would show if you have had a previous infection. Antibodies are proteins that help fight off germs. This test may not be able to show if you have a current infection, because it can take 1 to 3 weeks to make antibodies after symptoms occur. Governor Cuomo announced on April 27, 2020, that the results of the largest random sample of 7,500 New Yorkers from across the state indicates that “14.9% of those tested statewide tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies.”^{viii} Additional antibody testing is to be done for 1,000 NYPD and FDNY, 3,000 healthcare workers and 1,000 transit workers.

The results of these tests will provide a clearer picture of how prevalent COVID-19 has been and how deeply it has penetrated our community. Kaiser Health News reported that 20% of tested New York City residents were positive for antibodies, while the AP News reports only 3.6% of those tested upstate were positive for antibodies. The large gap indicates that if the virus lands in an upstate community, there is a much greater risk of an outbreak because not enough people have had and recovered from the virus to create some level of immunity through antibody presence in their bodies. (Referred to as “herd immunity” and typically considered to be 70% of a population having antibodies). No information was available at the time of writing this *Update* regarding availability of antibody testing in the Capital District or of the general public. The lack of availability of antibody testing is an important indication that the system to truly manage the COVID-19 virus is not fully in place.

This information brings us back to the question of immunity. It is hoped that the results of the random antibody tests will contribute to better understanding the virus and helping to determine going forward to what extent, if any, the antibodies provide immunity. Refer to *Update #7* for more regarding immunity.

Special Focus: Food Insecurity

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted a finely tuned food production and distribution system in the United States (as well as globally). The intricate pattern of relationships that exist to provide food to hotels, restaurants, and other food service outlets was suddenly, without forewarning, broken. From the farmers and ranchers who produce fresh fruits and vegetables, meat and dairy products to a significant portion of the 26 million people who have lost jobs as the result of the government directives to close non-essential businesses, COVID-19 is headed to creating a level of food insecurity previously unseen. On April 21st, the United Nations “projected that because of Covid-19, the number of people facing severe food insecurity worldwide could double to 265 million. The same week, in the United States, the five-week total of job losses rose to a staggering 26 million, pushing millions more into food insecurity.”^{xix}

The United States Agriculture Department (USDA) defines “food insecurity” as “a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.”^x Because food insecurity results in people not having access to foods with high nutritional value, it has a profound impact on overall health making individuals more likely to suffer from diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease, stroke, cancer, arthritis, coronary heart disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The USDA breaks food insecurity into two categories:

1. **Low food security** - when the food you eat is lower-quality or isn’t very appealing, and you don’t have many choices. But you typically get enough food.
2. **Very low food security** - when you can’t get food when you need to, or you have to eat less because you don’t have money or other ways to get it.^{xi}

Considering that 1 in 9 Americans experienced food insecurity prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the loss of jobs, food supply chain disruptions and grocery shortages more and more people are looking to alternate food sources in their communities, such as food banks, soup kitchens, not-for-profit organizations, churches and community gardens. In many locations, the demand for food is so high that food pantry resources are growing thin. In fact, 40% of food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City have had to close.^{xii} “Many suddenly unemployed workers...have been pushed to the edge of hunger” and wait in food lines that are miles long in New Jersey.^{xiii} In Schenectady, over 600 hundred people appeared to obtain free food at a drive-through distribution at the Schenectady County Community College on April 22nd.^{xiv}

So where does the Capital Region fall in meeting the food needs of its residents? What resources are available to assist everyone in accessing healthy food? One of the key resources is the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York, but here are many additional organizations playing critical roles in ensuring healthy food is available to everyone. Please take the time to review the accompanying “*Resources Available to You – 4-30-20*” document for specific information regarding organizations serving those in need of food (and often other resources).

Finally, as of April 27, 2020, the New York State website indicates that \$25 million will be provided to food banks and providers most impacted by COVID-19. In addition, a “Nourish New York Initiative” is being established to purchase food and products from upstate New York farms and

direct it to food banks across the state, working to both prevent waste and to feed New Yorkers in need of food (<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov>).

Please refer to the references cited at the end of this *Update* and to the accompanying Resource document or the Macedonia website for additional information about topics discussed in this edition of the *Update*.

If you have questions regarding COVID-19, contact the CDC at www/cdc/gov/coronavirus or the New York State Department of Health Coronavirus Hotline at (888) 364-3065 or go to www.ny.gov/coronavirus

Keeping Up Church Operations and Programs

In order to continue to maintain our edifice and the programs that Macedonia provides and supports, there are two options to continue contributing your tithes and offering: Online donations or by check. *The church prefers the use of “Online Giving” as it is a direct transfer from you to the church.* To use the online options, follow these steps:

- Go to the website at: www.macedoniaofalbany.org
- Click “Giving” - on the following window, scroll down to select either:
 - “Online Giving” which allows you to give using a debit or credit card or through your bank.
 - “Donate” which allows you to give using PayPal, debit, or credit card. *Be aware that PayPal requires a third party to transfer funds to the church.*
- If you choose the “Online Giving” option, you will have the opportunity to select whether you want to create an account or give as a guest, *and to designate how you want your contribution allocated, i.e. tithes, benevolence, scholarship, etc.*
- For either option you choose, after you submit you will see a screen indicating your donation was received and receive an email acknowledging your donation.

For those who prefer to contribute by check, you may send your tithes and offerings through the mail. *Each day one of the Trustees stops at church to secure any checks received through the mail.* Be sure to address your envelope to:

**Macedonia Baptist Church
26 Wilson Ave.
Albany, NY 12205**

*It has been brought to our attention that the post office equipment does not handle the size of our offering envelopes well. Therefore, if you have an offering envelope at home, feel free to enclose your check, and seal the envelope. Then place the offering envelope inside a standard letter or business envelope prior to mailing. Remember - **DO NOT MAIL CASH!***

We will continue to be alert to our everchanging landscape, but we will also continue to hold God's unchanging hand for we are a people of faith. And remember "...perfect love casteth out fear..." (1 John 4:18)

DISCLAIMER

The information contained in the E-news and otherwise disseminated by Macedonia Baptist Church and its authorized agents concerning COVID-19 (Coronavirus) are for informational purposes only. The content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition or precautions appropriate for your specific circumstances. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided as of the date of the content issued, however, due to the unprecedented nature of the current public health emergency and rapidly changing guidance, please consult with your physician or qualified healthcare provider and/or the reputable resources listed for the latest changes.

ⁱ "COVID-19 Testing," New York State Department of Health, April 27, 2020
<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-testing>

ⁱⁱ "Testing Falls Woefully Short as Trump Seeks an End to Stay-at-Home Orders," by Abby Goodnough, Katie Thomas & Sheila Kaplan, New York Times, April 28, 2020.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/us/coronavirus-testing-trump.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Amid Ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic, Governor Cuomo Outlines Phased Plan to Re-open New York Starting With Construction and Manufacturing," Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's website, Albany, NY, April 26, 2020.
<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/amid-ongoing-covid-19-pandemic-governor-cuomo-outlines-phased-plan-re-open-new-york-starting>

^{iv} *Former CDC director: There's a long war ahead and our Covid-19 response must adapt* by Dr. Tom Frieden <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/20/health/coronavirus-response-must-adapt-frieden-analysis/index.html>

^v "COVID-19 Testing," New York State Department of Health, April 27, 2020
<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-testing>

^{vi} Ditto

^{vii} "COVID-19 Update", Albany Medical Center, April 27, 2020
https://www.amc.edu/patient/services/infectious_disease/coronavirus.cfm#Testing%20Information

^{viii} "Coronavirus Antibodies Present in Nearly 25% of All NYC Residents, Cuomo Says; Un-PAUSE in Certain Regions of NY Might Begin in May" CBS News, Albany, NY. April 27, 2020
<https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2020/04/27/coronavirus-antibodies-present-in-nearly-25-of-all-nyc-residents/>

^{ix} COVID-19 and Food Security, Center for Strategic & International Studies, csis.org
<https://www.csis.org/programs/global-food-security-program/covid-19-and-food-security>

^x “*What is Food Insecurity*,” Hunger and Health – Feeding America Website
https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/#_ftn3

^{xi} “*What is Food Insecurity*,” WebMD
<https://www.webmd.com/diet/food-insecurity#1>

^{xii} COVID-19 and Food Security – Ibid.

^{xiii} “Food Lines a Mile Long in America’s Second Wealthiest State” by Tracey Tulley, New York Times, April 30, 2020
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/30/nyregion/coronavirus-nj-hunger.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

^{xiv} “*Hundreds Line Up for Food Bank at Schenectady County Community College*” by Paul Nelson, Times Union, April 23, 2020
[https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/Hundreds-line-up-for-food-bank-at-Schenectady-15218336.php?utm_campaign=CMS%20Sharing%20Tools%20\(Premium\)&utm_source=share-by-email&utm_medium=email](https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/Hundreds-line-up-for-food-bank-at-Schenectady-15218336.php?utm_campaign=CMS%20Sharing%20Tools%20(Premium)&utm_source=share-by-email&utm_medium=email)