



SEPTEMBER 2020

The governor's call to action: 'We're not pau yet'

If there's one thing we've learned in the past few months, it's that no one has all the answers to fight COVID-19. That means we're all part of the solution — from masking up and avoiding large gatherings to ramped-up testing and contact tracing to identify as many cases as possible. This issue highlights some of the state's latest efforts to get the current community spread of the virus under control at a critical time when we need everyone's help in this fight. Let's do this for Hawai'i.

Q. What do you want people to know about the most recent steps to limit the spread of COVID-19?

A. We're attacking community spread of the virus on all fronts. The "Stay at Home, Work from Home" emergency order for O'ahu mandates some of the earlier restrictions from March to drive down the current surge. We're also working with federal, state and county partners for "surge testing" until Sept. 14 and an expanded **contact tracing program**, which recently moved to larger quarters at the Hawai'i Convention Center. Our new Disease Investigation Branch Chief, Dr. Emily Roberson, is putting more efficient systems in place for faster follow-up of cases. We also have added facilities for isolating and quarantining those who need it.

Q. What do you think will make the difference in bringing case numbers down?

A. We want people to understand the wide range of situations that fuel community spread. Prevention is the key, along with effective contact tracing and testing. But contact tracing alone can't stop a surge in cases. Stopping the spread of the virus has to be everyone's responsibility. That means taking precautions, even for day-to-day activities that seem low risk and involve close friends and family.

Q. For O'ahu, what did you and Mayor Caldwell consider in issuing the latest restrictions? What should we all be aware of from recent COVID-19 cases?

A. We decided the stay-at-home order was needed because we were still seeing case counts in the triple digits, which created increased stress on our healthcare system. The mayor has described this as an opportunity to reset. We're taking a comprehensive approach with surge testing of even asymptomatic people, expanded contact tracing, and isolating family members so they don't infect others in the household. The important thing is that people can't let down their guard. Based on recent COVID-19 cases, the sources of infection have ranged from larger social gatherings to smaller groups of co-workers eating lunch together — all without proper safeguards.

Q. What's important to know about the recent 12th Emergency Proclamation and future CARES Act fund distribution?

A. Our priority continues to be the health and safety of our community, so the mandates we've developed support that. We're extending until **Sept. 30** the interisland travel quarantine for those arriving on the neighbor islands as well as the 14-day mandatory travel quarantine. We're also delaying the start of the pre-travel testing program for trans-Pacific travel, **at least until Oct. 1**. Pushing back this program means our visitor industry will continue to face challenges so we're exploring other ways to bring visitors to Hawai'i safely. This proclamation gives counties the power to create "resort bubbles," where travelers would be required to stay within a resort area, monitored with a geofencing device until they complete their quarantine. If they leave the property, authorities would be alerted. To help those struggling, we're moving ahead with plans to provide rental relief, food distribution, and other assistance through **CARES funds** as well as take advantage of President Trump's executive order for **unemployment benefits**.



(top) Governor Ige with Dr. Emily Roberson and contact tracers at the Hawai'i Convention Center. (middle) Celebrities and local citizens join in a new safety campaign.

Surge testing and new restrictions to curb COVID-19

The recent surge in COVID-19 cases on O‘ahu has resulted in a new two-week stay-at-home order, combined with an aggressive campaign for widespread testing, contact tracing, quarantining and isolation. The most recent **“Stay at Home, Work from Home”** order for O‘ahu, which went into effect Aug. 27, is similar to an earlier one issued by Governor Ige in March, which allowed only essential services to remain open, encouraging telework and limiting restaurants to take-out only.

“Federal, state and county assets are being combined in the best way possible to keep our community healthy and safe. We know what we need to do; we’ve done it before,” said the governor, who worked with Mayor Kirk Caldwell and others to coordinate the new plan. The federally supported **“surge testing,”** which gives the state the capacity to conduct 5,000 COVID-19 tests per day statewide, was described as a “game changer” at an Aug. 25 news conference with U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams — part of a national effort to get the virus under control. He spoke of Hawai‘i being in the “yellow-caution” positivity rate of 5 to 10 percent in COVID-19 tests, not the “green” range (under 5 percent) for reopening. “You’re at a turning point,” he said. “Things could get really bad and go to ‘red’ really quickly or they could be much improved if people do the right things.” Anyone who wants to get tested can go to www.doineedacovid19test.com to sign up for a time through Sept. 14. **The tests are free of charge and no doctor’s order is needed**, with results provided through e-mail notification in as early as three days.

An earlier **“Act with Care, Do Not Gather”** order for O‘ahu targeted large gatherings of people — especially where there is no physical distancing and wearing of masks. Honolulu Police Chief Susan Ballard delivered some tough talk, saying people should contact a newly established **COVID-19 enforcement hotline at (808) 723-3900 or email hpdcovidenforce@honolulu.gov** to report violators. “We’ve tried to warn people, educate people,” she said. “At this point, there are probably going to be very few warnings. It’s going to be either citations or arrests.” Mayor Caldwell said this order allows people to “traverse” in and out of the ocean for water activities, but “we need to clamp down as hard as possible on large, uncontrolled gatherings in parks, beaches and on trails.” Ballard added, “Please abide by the emergency proclamations. Let’s show we can do this.” For more details on the current orders, go to www.honolulu.gov. For questions, call 768-CITY, email covidresponse@honolulu.gov or go to oneoahu.org.

Ramping up Hawai‘i’s corps of ‘disease detectives’

Fighting the pandemic is taking a new turn in Hawai‘i with a newly hired director of Disease Investigation, an expanded corps of investigators and contact tracers and a bigger workspace at the Hawai‘i Convention Center. Dr. Emily Roberson, the Department of Health’s new branch chief, joined Governor Ige, HI-EMA director Kenneth Hara and DOH director Dr. Bruce Anderson at a news conference last month to describe expansion of the state’s contact tracing system, including the addition of Hawai‘i National Guard personnel and those recently trained by the University of Hawai‘i.



“I know many are concerned about the number of cases in our state, and we are too,” said Dr. Roberson. “That’s why our team is accelerating and expanding our disease investigation program.” The streamlining was designed for better workload distribution, simplified data collection, and focus on four groups to prevent larger-scale outbreaks. These groups include those in high-risk occupations, such as health care workers; high-risk settings, such as long-term care facilities, correctional facilities and public housing; high-risk individuals (older than 65 and those with chronic health conditions); and those sick with symptoms.

“Our goal is to focus our efforts to reduce the odds of spreading the disease further in our community,” said Dr. Roberson. She went on to explain the system developed to bring down case numbers. “It’s not something that happens in a vacuum. Contact tracers function as part of a team. We’re in the process of scaling up to be responsive to the numbers and the situation here on the ground.” **Roberson said there are currently 126 contact tracers statewide and 13 support staff, with plans to add more.** Director Hara added, “(The National Guard) anticipated needs and were able to train ahead of time. So when the request came, we were ready.”

Making your voice count

Looking for a way to make a difference? The governor’s office is seeking **qualified volunteers to fill vacancies on boards and commissions statewide.** “Their service is critical for input to various sectors of our community,” said Governor Ige. “It’s an important way for Hawai‘i citizens to have an active voice in government. Everyone has something to offer.” For details, go to boards.hawaii.gov or contact Sharon Ibarra at boards.commissions@hawaii.gov.

The human cost of COVID-19 hits home in Hawai‘i

A 34-year-old single mom. A 45-year-old construction worker. This is Hawai‘i’s face of COVID-19 — a disease as insidious as it is deadly — infecting people of all ages, not just the elderly. As case counts grow, how do you convince people to take the virus seriously, mask up and keep their distance — no matter how tempting it is to socialize? How do you guard against something you can’t see?



The Queen’s Health Systems
Sarah Bolles and Gualofa Nua praise healthcare workers and urge everyone to protect themselves and others from COVID-19 after the virus nearly killed them.

Maybe it won’t hit home until you experience the headache, the high fever and the fear that comes when you can’t breathe. That’s what happened to Sarah Bolles, who tested positive for COVID-19 in March, before the state’s widespread lockdowns and restrictions. She still doesn’t know how she contracted the virus, but she remembers thinking, “I’ll never get to see my family again (she has a 13-year-old daughter). They’re going to sedate me; they’re going to put me in a coma. It happened so fast.”

The doctors at Kaiser Permanente Moanalua put Bolles on a ventilator and kept her in a medically induced coma for three weeks. She was hospitalized for a month and a half and became tearful as she described being away from her daughter and other ‘ohana. “Being isolated, away from your family was the toughest part,” she recalled. “I was near death.”

Bolles is still dealing with the physical and emotional aftermath of her experience, but she credits the doctors and nurses at Kaiser, her family’s support and her strong faith for her survival. She implores everyone to wear their masks, physically distance and stay home when they’re sick. “Just think about the lives you are saving when you’re thinking about others and not just yourself,” she said. “We need to stop the spread, and we definitely need to work together.”

Gualofa Nua’s story of survival is even more dramatic because he became Hawai‘i’s first COVID-19 patient put on an ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) machine for patients whose lungs and heart are failing. The machine pumps and oxygenates blood outside the body in place of those organs. Nua told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, “I was coughing and having trouble breathing. . . I was told my heart stopped a couple of times and they were able to bring me back, so it’s been a crazy ride.”

Looking at earlier photos of the burly Nua, who described himself as “healthy as an ox,” it’s hard to imagine that a microscopic virus could have done so much damage. His wife, Tanya, remembers he returned from a construction expo in Las Vegas in mid-March, developed a persistent 103-degree fever and was finally admitted to **Queen’s Medical Center** on March 26. In a matter of days, Nua was placed on a ventilator and in a medically induced coma while his team of doctors kept researching different treatments and calling colleagues around the country for advice. “They tried everything they could,” said Tanya. “They weren’t going to give up.”

Lofa Nua was released at the end of May after 7 ½ weeks in the hospital. He’s recovering some of his strength through physical and occupational therapy, but still needs oxygen from time to time to help him breathe. “These are residual effects because his lungs are scarred,” explained Tanya. In the meantime, **they want people to take all the safety precautions seriously — especially with the rise in COVID-19 cases.** As Lofa Nua told the Star-Advertiser, “It can go sideways real quick,” he warned. “Don’t be so impatient to risk your health and your life just to get out. I understand people got to work and people got to eat, but this a whole other animal. . . . Would you want to take that chance just to go to the beach?”

As the virus surges, younger people account for the growing number of cases

People younger than 40 are driving the increase in COVID-19 cases in Hawai‘i, with the highest number of total cases in the 18- to 29-year-old category, according to new data from the state Department of Health. Doctors warn that young people need to take more precautions — not only to keep from spreading the virus to older Americans, but for their own health as well. For updated data, go to the [Hawai‘i COVID-19 dashboard](#).



State offers ‘one-stop’ crisis hotline

If you need crisis support, including help with **COVID-19 isolation and quarantine**, access to mental health resources and substance use treatment, Hawai‘i CARES is just a call away. The newly expanded “one-stop” hotline at **832-3100** or **1(800)753-6879** will connect you to advice and resources. “We’re here to listen and help you get through the challenges of the pandemic and beyond,” said program director Kathryn Boyer. The initiative is a partnership with the state Department of Health and the UH Mānoa’s School of Social Work.

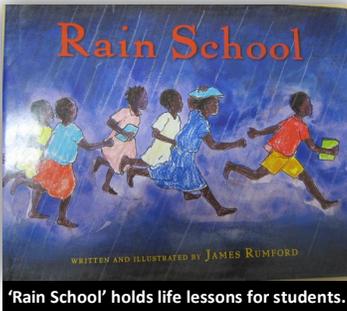
BRIGHT SPOTS

Family resources to keep learning, growing in tough times

“Never stop learning because life never stops teaching.” — Anonymous

If there were ever a time when all of us needed to keep learning and adapting, it’s now. From school and work routines to Zooming with friends, we’re all on a learning curve unlike anything we’ve faced before. With school schedules disrupted, what can families do to stay positive? What community resources are available to help? And what lessons can COVID-19 teach us about meeting challenges and working together?

The value of learning and teamwork is part of the message of the book, “Rain School,” featured in Mrs. Ige’s Ōlelo series for September. “The students living in a village in Chad had to build their own school so they could learn. They worked together to construct everything from scratch, only to lose it in the rainy season,” explained Mrs. Ige. “But what they learned could never be lost.”



Families looking for learning opportunities beyond the school day can turn to a one-stop website that features fun, creative activities for all ages. The comprehensive, curated list at <http://sfca.hawaii.gov/artsed-resources/> was compiled by Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (SFCA) staff. It includes links to online performances by Hawai'i arts and culture organizations, activity guides, and virtual tours and performances from around the world. For example, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources has links to its forestry and wildlife division for downloadable activities at <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/education/forestry-wildlife/teachers-resources/>. To help children learn more about ocean and marine life, go to the state's Division of Aquatic Resources page at <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/dar/education/> to download colorful posters, activity books and even a free app called "Reef Defender."

New 'Buy Hawai'i, Give Aloha' site

A new online marketplace for local products is just a click away with the launch of a new website from the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism. The “Buy Hawai'i, Give Aloha” site was created for businesses that have at least 75 percent of their products made in Hawai'i. “Retail really has been hit hard,” said Lyle Fujikawa, DBEDT economic development specialist. “This is one means for a company to get started in recovery.” The easy-to-navigate site enables shoppers to browse a wide array of locally made apparel, farm products, food items, household goods, restaurants, and more. As the site says, “Show your aloha for Hawai'i-brands and products. When you buy from Hawai'i companies, your money stays here at home, creating jobs and strengthening our economy.”



DHS's Bhanot steps down; Betts named new director

After an impressive 21-year career at the state's Department of Human Services (DHS), director Pankaj Bhanot announced he was leaving his position Aug. 31. “I planned on leaving in the beginning of 2020 for health reasons, but due to COVID-19 I chose to stay to usher the department through these unprecedented times,” he said.



His replacement is Cathy Betts, who has served as DHS deputy director since October 2017. Prior to that, she has been the executive director for the Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women, a deputy attorney general, and a community outreach worker for The Sex Abuse Treatment Center at Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women and Children.



In an interview prior to his departure, Bhanot urged anyone affected by the coronavirus pandemic to look to DHS for help. Because thousands of people statewide lost their jobs in the wake of COVID-19, DHS has been flooded with thousands of applications for benefits. But Bhanot is proud of the way the department has been able to respond. “That is 'Ohana Nui. That is the aloha spirit,” he said.

Betts added, “I look forward to continuing this good work with our many community stakeholders to help families stay safe, healthy and thrive.” To learn more about DHS programs and services related to childcare, food/financial or medical insurance, go to <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/>.

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