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Cook County Unveils COVID-19 Alternative Housing Program for Recovering Patients, Health Care Professionals and First Responders

CHICAGO – Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, joined by the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA), Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) and Cook County Department of Emergency Management and Regional Security (EMRS) today announced a multi-phased, COVID-19 alternative housing plan designed to support suburban Cook County residents, health care professionals and first responders.

Under this plan, in partnership with IEMA, suburban Cook County residents who test positive for COVID-19, are recovering well, but remain in need of temporary housing as they continue to improve outside a hospital's care, will have an opportunity to stay in temporary housing identified by EMRS. Qualifying participants of the program may include homeless, housing insecure or those who do not have a separate room and bathroom to safely isolate at home.

"In these challenging times, we want Cook County residents to know that options are available if they receive a COVID-19 diagnosis and are concerned about self-isolating at home," said President Preckwinkle.

County officials soft-launched the alternative housing plan several weeks ago and roughly 400 hotel beds have since been made available for suburban Cook County residents under this program. Starting today, all 20 suburban Cook County hospitals as well as Chicago hospitals will be notified that the program is available for medically-stable persons recovering from COVID-19. Cook County will seek to identify additional housing as needed.

If a person tests positive for COVID-19, has received treatment and is set to be discharged from the hospital to continue recuperating, the patient can tell a hospital social worker they may not be able to adequately self-isolate. The hospital will call a Cook County Department of Public Health hotline who will screen the patient, confirm their need for housing, and then immediately work to place them in the temporary housing.

Plans are in place to expand the program to serve suburban health care professionals and first responders also in need of temporary housing.

"We are taking a health equity approach to ensure our most vulnerable residents have quality, safe spaces to quarantine or isolate under the stay at home order," said CCDPH Senior Medical Officer Dr. Kiran Joshi. "We expect this intervention to be particularly beneficial to residents from the south and west suburbs, where we are seeing the highest rates of illness, hospitalizations and deaths."

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At a press conference held last Saturday, Dr. Joshi said African Americans are getting ill at a rate more than 3 times that of whites; and dying at a rate 4 times higher. COVID-19 rates in the south suburbs, which are predominantly black, are twice as high as in the north suburbs, which are predominantly white.

“Everyone should be staying home to contain the spread of germs,” said CCDPH Senior Medical Officer Dr. Rachel Rubin. “Alternative housing gives people the option to rest and recuperate away from other people and will further help prevent the spread of COVID-19.”

Public health officials are warning residents to stay home, maintain a physical distance of 6 feet from others as much as possible, and wear a cloth face covering when going out for essential services or work to keep germs from spreading to others.

For more information, visit www.cookcountypublichealth.org, call the CCDPH COVID-19 Hotline at 708-633-3319, email ccdph.covid19@cookcountyhhs.org, follow CCDPH on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ccdph and Twitter at www.twitter.com/cookcohealth. For the latest updates, text ALERTCOOK (one word) to 888-777.

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