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Unified Command to transition to COVID-19 Recovery Coordination Team

Expanded structure will allow continued focus supporting multi-faceted recovery work

LAWRENCE – Douglas County’s Unified Command structure that has been responsible for leading the comprehensive COVID-19 pandemic response since March will transition next week to an expanded COVID-19 Recovery Coordination Team to help manage the community’s long-term recovery.

“We have seen good results in Douglas County so far, and our Unified Command leaders are grateful for all the community members who have made great sacrifices and followed public health recommendations to help us flatten the curve of the coronavirus in our community,” said Lawrence City Manager Craig Owens. “We believe this collaborative leadership structure has paid dividends, and we are looking to expand that because it will continue to take an intensive community effort to keep the virus at bay and manage the recovery so life can return to normal as safely as possible.”

The core Unified Command leadership team of Owens, Douglas County Administrator Sarah Plinsky, Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health Director Dan Partridge and LMH Health President and CEO Russ Johnson will be joined in leading the recovery coordination team by The Chamber of Lawrence’s President and CEO Bonnie Lowe, Lawrence Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Anthony Lewis, University of Kansas Chancellor Dr. Doug Girod and Douglas County Health Officer Dr. Thomas Marcellino.

These leaders have already worked together in recent weeks on the Unified Command’s Reopening Task Force that developed the Smart and Safe Reopening Douglas County plan, which is currently aligned with [Gov. Laura Kelly’s plan](#) and entered Phase 2 on Friday, May 22.

Through May 22, Douglas County has 62 COVID-19 cases (54 have recovered) since its first lab-confirmed case on March 16, and residents have lived under several local health orders since mid-March.

The Unified Command task force has also unveiled a Smart and Safe: Reopening Douglas County Community Scorecard available [online](#). It includes metrics that are helping guide the task force’s decisions on how to proceed with reopening phases or to potentially add restrictions in the future if necessary. The scorecard includes information on the status of local transmission cases, potential outbreaks, the number of active COVID-19 cases in the county and the community’s medical surge capacity, including percent of hospital beds in use and percent of ventilators in use at LMH Health.

The Unified Command leadership has worked in conjunction with the Douglas County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) that provided resources and assistance from the state and federal levels

of government.

Robert Bieniecki, Director of Douglas County Emergency Management, said Unified Command is planning to deactivate Friday, May 29, and transition to the COVID-19 Recovery Coordination Team. Members of the public likely won't notice a dramatic change with the transition as far as the local COVID-19 response.

"This will continue to be an active effort mobilized in many areas to both work to help the community continue to mitigate the effect of COVID-19 and support those various recovery functions that will be so important in coming months," Bieniecki said.

Under the new Recovery Coordination Team, the recovery support functions will focus on:

- Economic Recovery
- Health and Medical Services
- Housing and Human Services
- Education

The new structure will also include a team of equity impact advisors appointed to help focus on equity issues as part of the recovery, as well as continuing support for managing logistics, finance and providing public information.

Douglas County residents are still advised to take precautions and follow public health orders, including the Phase 2 restriction on mass gatherings of no more than 15 people.

"Our community members have done a good job so far at practicing social distancing and complying with local health orders. This has put us into a position to be able to open up more of our economy and community," Marcellino said. "We are watching metrics very closely. If we don't take social distancing measures seriously, it could be necessary for us to prolong phases of the Governor's reopening or go back to previous restrictive measures. Cloth masks are especially important and should be used as much as possible."

"We are being thoughtful, smart and deliberate about these decisions so that we can feel confident as we seek to advance in phases," Plinsky said. "It's up to the public to help us maintain this really great success that we've had so far."

Individuals experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19 are encouraged to contact their healthcare provider or the Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health Coronavirus Hotline, 785-856-4343, to speak to a nurse to be screened for potential testing. The ability to identify positive COVID-19 cases, isolate them and trace their potential close contacts to quarantine them will also continue to be critical in coming weeks and months, Marcellino said.

Anyone with questions about a public health order can email phorders@ldchealth.org.