

Select Subcommittee on Coronavirus Crisis Hearing

Remarks of Tom Inglesby, MD
Director, Center for Health Security
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
May 13, 2020

Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to speak with you today.

COVID-19 has done great damage to our country both in terms of sickness and loss-of-life and terms of terrible economic consequence and job loss. To minimize the risk of COVID spread accelerating in a state during re-opening, four conditions should be in place.

- Reduction in cases for 14 days
- Capacity for hospitals to give all COVID patients standard of care
- Capacity to test anyone with COVID symptoms
- Finally, the capacity to isolate cases, trace their contacts, and guide them into quarantine

Isolation and contact tracing have been crucial for countries that have gotten the COVID epidemics under comparatively better control by identifying those at high risk of getting infected and intervening to stop that chain of transmission.

If we fail to contact trace effectively, we will continue to have new cases appearing in completely unpredictable ways – numbers and places, and our epidemic will grow more quickly.

To do contact tracing well, we need on the order of 100,000 contact tracers working for states across the country this year. Which is about 30 workers per 100,000 population in the state. As of last week, states have announced plans to hire about 66,000 workers and eight states have announced plans to exceed the 30 per 100,000 benchmark.

To close, contact tracing will need to be a key part of our strategy until widespread vaccination can happen. Together with widespread diagnostic testing, strong individual commitment to at least six feet physical distancing, cloth mask use in public, and avoiding gatherings. If we do all this work together, we can lower our local and national risks and begin to reopen the economy as safely as will be possible given the great COVID challenges that remain ahead of us.

Thank you.