



# St. Louis health leaders form the **Metropolitan Pandemic Task Force** and partner with local organizations to fight the pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic brings extraordinary challenges to the St. Louis region, physicians and health care leaders from BJC HealthCare, Mercy, SSM Health and St. Luke’s Hospital remain united in their mission to support the community through this difficult time. We are working in close partnership with local and state health departments and our academic medical institutions, Saint Louis University and Washington University Schools of Medicine.

We know that preparation, cooperation and participation by the entire St. Louis community will enable us to weather the COVID-19 pandemic together.

## **THE ST. LOUIS METROPOLITAN PANDEMIC TASK FORCE**

In an innovative and expanded collaboration, BJC HealthCare, Mercy, SSM Health and St. Luke’s Hospital have formed the St. Louis Metropolitan Pandemic Task Force with the goal of slowing the transmission of COVID-19 and saving lives across the St. Louis region. The task force also is coordinating with public health departments, elected leaders and state and federal agencies.

Information from other countries and U.S. areas impacted earlier in the pandemic, along with data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state and local health departments, strongly indicate that the St. Louis region will see a surge of COVID-19 patients within the next two weeks. The surge will undoubtedly put a strain on our health care resources.

Our task force is working together to coordinate capacity, staffing, supplies and other critical assets to prevent that surge in patients from overwhelming the region’s health care resources.

We also are coordinating with public health departments, elected leaders and state and federal agencies to make sure area residents have factual, current information and access to the best possible care. The St. Louis Metropolitan Pandemic Task Force holds daily press briefings at 3 p.m., streamed live on its Facebook page, [facebook.com/St-Louis-Metropolitan-Pandemic-Task-Force](https://www.facebook.com/St-Louis-Metropolitan-Pandemic-Task-Force).

Alex Garza, MD, chief medical officer for SSM Health, serves as incident commander for the task force. A former assistant secretary and chief medical officer for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Dr. Garza led the U.S. response to the H1N1 pandemic.

Dr. Garza and the rest of the task force stress that while our planning is vital to preparing for the upcoming surge of patients, it’s the actions of area residents that will ultimately determine how the St. Louis region fares in the fight against COVID-19.

“The next 10 days to two weeks are critical,” Dr. Garza says. “Our hospitals are already working to save lives and doing heroic work. But what we do as individuals will directly reduce the number of patients into our health care systems and impact whether our health care providers are able to manage the curve. What we do as individuals will affect how many people get sick — and how many people are able to recover.”

## **GETTING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES INTO OUR COMMUNITIES**

As members of the St. Louis Metropolitan Pandemic Task Force, we also are partnering with other local organizations to get crucial information and resources into at-risk communities.

BJC, Mercy, SSM and St. Luke’s are supporting the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County Health Departments, the St. Louis Regional Health Commission, St. Louis Integrated Health Network, the Missouri Foundation for Health and other organizations in a unified communications and outreach campaign called “Prepare STL.”

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Through the initiative, Prepare STL is reaching out to the area’s most vulnerable communities during the pandemic to share crucial information about COVID-19, including social distancing recommendations, proper handwashing instructions, symptoms to watch for, what to do if symptoms occur, how to access testing and more.

Over the next several weeks, Prepare STL is reaching these communities through neighborhood visits, TV commercials, social media information and literature posted in prominent places.

Vulnerable communities at highest risk have been identified for direct visits through street canvassing and mobile outreach. In these areas, Prepare STL will send individuals and information to nearly 700 community locations, such as grocery and convenience stores, gas stations, pharmacies, health centers, laundromats, bus stop shelters and other public locations as needed.

The community canvasses this week and will continue over the next several weeks, with the distribution of posters, signs and flyers.

## **WHAT WE ALL MUST DO TO STOP THE SPREAD**

The best way to increase everyone’s chances of staying healthy is simple — just stay home. COVID-19 is spread from person to person, so limiting the people you physically interact with lowers your risk of contracting the virus.

Here are some stay-at-home guidelines for every household:

- Keep 6 feet away from others. This helps you avoid the respiratory droplets spread by sneezing or coughing that spread the virus.
- Wash your hands frequently.

- Disinfect the surfaces you touch frequently, like kitchen counters, doorknobs and toilet handles.
- Avoid touching your face, nose, mouth and eyes.
- If you can work from home, do so.
- Avoid social gatherings of 10 or more people.

We know that with your help, the St. Louis community will emerge from this challenging time stronger than ever.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON COVID-19 AND RELATED ISSUES, CALL OR VISIT:

Missouri Department of Health  
877-435-8411

Illinois Department of Health  
[dph.illinois.gov/covid19](https://dph.illinois.gov/covid19)

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov)  
[who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019](https://who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019)

[bjc.org/coronavirus](https://bjc.org/coronavirus)  
[mercy.net/covid19](https://mercy.net/covid19)  
[ssmhealth.com](https://ssmhealth.com)  
[stlukes-stl.com](https://stlukes-stl.com)

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