

August 5, 2020

Daily COVID Positive Case Number and Deaths, Governor Whitmer Press Briefings – How I Have Come to Getting Michigan State COVID-Related Information Since April.

Every day, since perhaps April or May, although I can't quite remember, the State of Michigan releases the daily number of new COVID-19 positive cases and deaths around 3pm. I know that I can find these numbers in a brief Twitter headline from a state government Twitter Handle, and/or news sources like local TV stations and newspapers like the Detroit Free Press or MLIVE. I will either jump on Twitter to find this information around 3pm or later in the day to catch up on the latest case counts and related information. Some days I find relief that the number of cases remain about the same. Other days, like in the last few weeks, I've seen the number of cases increase from 300+ to 600+, and I feel silently resigned to bear witness to the virus continue to shape and dictate our daily life. I don't like that the case numbers have gone up, even has the number of tests administered have increased. It still feels like there is a slowly growing increase of cases that means an uptick or a local outbreak is just around the corner.

(Due to case numbers increasing over the summer, we've elected to forgo simple things like trips to the local parks and playgrounds in Jackson, a trip to Lake Michigan because of the risk associated with using public bathrooms and eating out while traveling to our destination, or going to get ice cream at local places – a long standing, favorite summer time treat for me. It all feels like a risk that we are unwilling to take because too many people out in the public are not taking this seriously by not wearing a mask or too many people are gathered in public crowds where the virus could easily spread. It has been increasingly saddening, frustrating and upsetting that, because of people's poor choices and blatant disregard to NOT take action to help stop the spread of the virus, cautious families like mine feel like we cannot even venture out to enjoy the simple pleasures of summer. Instead we focus on staying home, investing in things new bikes so we can ride the local bike trails as a way to enjoy life during a Michigan summer or building a sandbox in our backyard so that the kids can play.)

Knowing that the State releases this information daily, and that they do things like acknowledge when new cases are found and/or backlogs in tests and/or changes in the way data was collected end up resulting in spikes in daily cause numbers, provides a point comfort obtaining information on the virus and in living in this state during this time of tumult. In 2017, we moved from Central, South Carolina, to Jackson, Michigan to raise our family. Having been Michigan residents for years as kids, and having our parents still living here, my husband and I were excited to return back "home" to Michigan. Now, watching the way different states and administrations are handling this disease and public health and financial crisis, I (we) feel relieved to be living here now, during the pandemic. We feel that our Governor and her team is looking out for our family, our livelihood, and our life. Had we still been living in South Carolina, I think we would be in a state of panic. The handling of this crisis in South Carolina is virtually the poster child of the opposite of what the response has been in Michigan. South Carolina has an outbreak of epic proportions, and has no sign of subsiding. I know a lot of people there that are very concerned at how the pandemic is being handled, and are outraged at the way state leaders are mishandling the response to the virus in terms of life, economy and the inevitable return to school.

From time to time – more than monthly, less than weekly – Governor Gretchen Whitmer holds press briefings to announce the latest information on the public health crisis – if cases are going up fast, if new mandates that affect a large portion of the population have been levied, information on how the

administration is considering opening up and/or the effects on the economy, school openings, social justice and COVID issues, and other information. For me, these somewhat regular press briefings are a way for me to hear directly from our State's top leader, providing a point of stability and comfort during this unprecedented time. I don't always agree with everything that she has done or said, but I do like knowing that, on big things, I can usually count on hearing about the decision from her. I like hearing from her, and not through the lens of the press. It's helpful to have the media synthesize and analyze her briefings, but I like to hear everything that she's said so I can have my own, informed sense of what's going on. I also like hearing the way she talks – straightforward, pragmatic, and you can hear her hesitancy on issues she knows that may cause consternation. It feels real, authentic, and makes her and this whole situation a bit more human and easier to bear. It feels like she's in it with us – not against us. Full disclosure – I am a democrat, so, perhaps, I seek more comfort from her than if there was a Republican in charge. However, more than politics, the way that I see her handling this – information, body language, - is really what is driving my sense that she seems to have Michigan's best interest in mind. That's no small order, with the magnitude and diverse population we have in such a large state.