

Tyndall Community,

I am writing to ask for your help, and in some cases your understanding. As you are aware, many medical experts believe that we are quickly approaching the apex of the CORONA virus curve in our area. Simply put, the time is here for us to ride out the storm that the experts tell us is coming. Some who have gone through this “peak” before us have warned that actions that seem excessive beforehand will likely seem insufficient afterwards. I plan to take their warning seriously and act accordingly.

Here is some background to explain why the actions I will discuss below are prudent and necessary to implement now. As you know, medical experts believe that the CORONA virus spreads by close human contact. The CDC tells us the distance and time between two humans, or the “bubble,” that could lead to virus transmission. When we discover a positive case of the virus on our base, we follow CDC and Air Force Surgeon General protocol. Our public health team runs a contact trace. They identify, in painstaking detail, every person an infected member may have contacted inside the CDC “bubble” within the 14 days preceding their first symptom. Every person on that contact list goes into a 14-day quarantine to monitor for their own symptoms of the virus. If you breach the CORONA virus “bubble” of an infected member and show up on their contact trace, you go into quarantine. If you linger inside the bubble, you put yourself, your family, and our mission at risk. The goal of social distancing is to NEVER show up on someone else’s contact trace.

Experts tell us the peak of the COVID-19 curve is approaching our state, and projections suggest the curve could be with us for several weeks. Therefore, we are implementing the following additional protective measures at Tyndall AFB for the next three weeks. These actions go into effect on Monday 13 April and will be in effect until 3 May. I will also extend the Public Health Emergency for Tyndall AFB until 3 May, in a separate order, to cover this period. This timeline is our best estimate with the data we have, and we will extend it if needed. In the meantime, I ask for your help and your understanding as we take the following actions.

Starting on Monday 13 April, and for the next three weeks...

1. We will continue our essential missions at Tyndall AFB. We don’t get to stop being our nation’s Air Force. Our nation trusts us to perform our national defense missions, and our enemies are watching us. We will take every prudent precaution to keep all of our people safe, but we will not stop performing our critical missions. Americans rest easy knowing that we still have the watch defending our homeland and testing and training the world’s most lethal fighter pilots, maintainers, air battle managers and cutting edge engineers. That’s Tyndall’s job, and we have the watch.
2. To reduce the risk to our Mission Essential Personnel, please do not come to Tyndall AFB unless you absolutely have to be here. We need to reduce the number of people coming through our gates every day. After implementing the Secretary of Defense’s guidance on 2

April, we reduced our daily traffic on base by approximately two-thirds. That's good, but it's not good enough, especially now. Approximately 2,000 people drive through our gates each day, and as much as 50% of that traffic is non-mission related. To reduce the risk for you and for those who need to be on base, please DO NOT come to the base for the next three weeks if you don't need to be here. We have measures to further restrict access if necessary, but we hope your voluntary compliance avoids having to use them.

3. We will temporarily alter operations at our Pharmacy. Like many of you, our medical professionals are using every authority they have to balance doing their mission and protecting their people. For a number of very good reasons, our staff is keeping the Pharmacy doors open with less than half a full staff at any given time until we emerge on the backside of the curve. We will temporarily modify their workload to enable them to sustain their mission essential operations. For the next three weeks, we will offer new prescriptions and refills to active duty service members. We will offer refill service for all of our beneficiaries, if called into our refill line. These services alone account for more than half the current workload. In order to continue serving all beneficiaries through the curve, we will route new prescriptions for our non-active duty beneficiaries to Tricare mail order or to a network pharmacy.

4. We will reduce patron density in our BX, Shoppette, and Commissary. I realize that many patrons rely on access to these facilities, and I also understand that despite our best efforts to plan ahead urgent needs do arise. However, we MUST reduce patron density during these critical weeks to minimize the chance of transmitting the virus. These three facilities present unique challenges to preserving the CDC bubble. I strongly urge that you DO NOT come to Tyndall AFB to shop at one of these facilities for the next three weeks unless there is an urgent need for you or your family. We are a small base and a tight community, and I am confident that we can trust each other to police each other. If you have an urgent requirement to use one of these three facilities, you must protect yourself and our dedicated workers by wearing a mask that covers your nose and mouth area. Please also respect our zero tolerance for violations of social distancing rules. If voluntary action does not adequately reduce patron density we will need to further restrict access to these important facilities.

5. We will cease operations at our Child Development Center for three weeks. We have been tracking head counts in the CDC for the last couple weeks, and we have identified mission impacts of a potential closure on each unit. Through the virus curve, we will cease CDC operations in order to be 100% sure we do not transmit the virus to any of our children or providers in one of our childcare centers.

We occasionally have to make tough choices with incomplete information. This is one of those times. The information that we do have strongly suggests that we are approaching the apex of the CORONA virus curve in our state. We crafted each of these temporary actions based on the best data we have at this time. I trust that you will understand because I know that's the kind of community we have.

I remain hopeful that we escape the worst of all this, and that the warning sent by those who have gone before us does not end up applying to us too. Instead, I hope that our actions prove to be “an overabundance of caution” and that we don’t find ourselves in the unenviable position of wishing we did more. These are the levers we have to pull, and the data tells us that now is the time to pull them.

I appreciate your help and your understanding. Please stay safe. Let’s hunker down through the curve and look forward to being better tomorrow than we are today.

Many thanks,

Col Brian Laidlaw  
Installation Commander