

as of: 14 March 1100hrs

The Thai gov't is officially reporting 82 COVID cases, 35 cured, 46 in hospitals with 1 death. It is VERY GOOD news that, with only a few exceptions, these cases are travel related. It is either the traveler himself or people in close contact with travelers who are infected. The main source of travel has been China or South Korea.

Recent reports bear this out. Two recent cases were airport workers: 1 an Immigration Officer = obvious direct contact with travelers; the other was a baggage handler = obviously a surface contact victim. Another interesting cluster occurred at a party. A group of 20 friends gather for a party. One group of 11 shared glasses of whiskey. One of those had had recent contact with a traveler from Singapore. All 11 of those who 'shared saliva' became ill, but seemingly no one else at the party. Hopefully, those 11 were isolated before they had a chance to spread the virus. What all this tells us is that there is, as yet, NO local, community wave of infections sweeping across the country! Unless you have more than casual contact with an infected person, you are not currently at risk. You are not going to get it in the mall or school. It's not lingering on every door knob or grocery cart handle.

Having said that, things are subject to change. It appears that on average in places where it is spreading in the community, one case infects 2-3 other people. 1,2,5,8,10,25....! If it breaks out into the community, it can spread fast. That's what happened in China, before they recognized it and that is what is happening currently in Italy because their initial response was much too slow. All of continental Europe is showing signs that it has broken out as well. Fortunately, for us here in Thailand that has yet to happen and as long as people either self-isolate or get hospitalized, it may not happen but it could. Those 10 people at the party could have been the seed that started something bad. 10,20,35,80,200....! But seemingly, that didn't happen!

I'd suggest that State-side things are likely to be similar to Thailand in many ways. I don't have the details but the simple fact that most of the States that have reported cases have less than 5; many with 1-3. That would suggest to me that it is still largely traveler-related in those places. As I have seen the data, only CA & WA are experiencing community spread; NY esp NYC is probably just now breaking that barrier. Epidemiologically, it makes little sense to treat the USA as if it were one entity. Thailand is 2/3 the size of Texas and it is not one entity. Community spread in Bangkok would be MUCH WORSE than community spread in Kanchanaburi due to population density.

Reasonable precautions are warranted; panic is not. Hand washing is a vital protective measure. Face masks (no matter how much you pay for them) really only do ONE THING = they keep you from touching your mouth and nose. If the virus is present in the environment, it will be on surfaces (the baggage handler) and not swirling around in the air for you to breathe in! If and when it breaks out into the community, mass disinfection will help = wiping down commonly touched surfaces such as door handles and cart handles in grocery stores.

If there is truly one measure that might be more effective than hand washing it might just be washable cotton gloves worn in public instead of, or in addition to, masks. You'd shed them upon returning home and wash them in hot water with a bit of bleach. But somehow, I don't see that becoming a fashion trend!

Should there actually be community spread occurring, social isolation will help mitigate the spread to some extent, but if infected people are out and about shedding virus on to common surfaces, keeping your distance isn't going to help. They are simply leaving a trail of particles for you to touch after they have been there. Distance, will not be enough! Soap & water hand washing will be the key. Alcohol gels are a good second tier measure to be used as soon as you get back to your car. Always, always, always wash your hands before eating!