

Expert: Let's talk about social distancing

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The need for social distancing will continue into the summer as an important public health tool to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Dr. Gregory Poland, an infectious diseases specialist at Mayo Clinic acknowledges the hardships of public safety measures and says they

important. "The nature of social distancing, isolating ourselves, and shelter-in-place has been tremendous hardships from an economic and emotional aspect."

As summer becomes autumn, Dr. Poland has an added concern. "Many of us think that the difficulty this coming fall is that we'll have return of COVID-19 from the Southern hemisphere on top of our annual influenza epidemic, and that's going to be a very difficult thing to try to thread the needle on." Dr. Poland recommends everyone eligible for a flu vaccine get one as soon as they are available for the season.

As plans are released to help the nation slowly reopen, Dr. Poland says the best plans, "are basically urging caution, move slowly, be able to contact trace, be able to do testing, and ensure that we have ways of monitoring so that if there is a problem, we detect it early enough to prevent another surge in demand on the medical system."

Social distancing is one of the plans in place to help slow the spread of the diseases. Contact tracing is more complex.

"Contact tracing basically means this: If I were to develop COVID-19, the idea would be that through the public health infrastructure, they would say, "OK, in the last 14 days, who have you been in contact with?" You can imagine how difficult that is and how much labor it takes to do that. And then they would notify those individuals that they have potentially been exposed through me. And they would also try to trace who was I exposed from, and then be able to try and control the disease or the outbreak of the disease by asking those people to self-quarantine. It's effective. It's been demonstrated over and over again if people will do it properly," says Dr. Poland.

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