Bucks health department mismanaged COVID

By Kierstyn P. Zolfo
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Each day, news of the pandemic grows more dire and an increasing number of people in my circle are falling ill or being hospitalized. I'm spending more and more time reading the local news and asking myself this question: "Is this the unavoidable consequence of a national pandemic or the results of local mismanagement?"

Here in Bucks County as I write this letter, over 650 people have died and over 15,000 people are infected with COVID. Were these deaths and infections unavoidable or due to local mismanagement?

Here in Bucks County, Dr. David Damsker, the Director of the Bucks County Board of Health, made the decision early in the trajectory of this pandemic and contrary to the recommended precautions from the Centers for Disease Control, to use "modified quarantine" for people who have been exposed to the coronavirus. That means they do not need to stay home for 14 days, but instead can go out and about in the public as long as they use a mask (something we all must do). Was putting the community at risk unavoidable, or local mismanagement?

Here in Bucks County, our schools were provided guidance in June from our health director that states "wearing masks will not be required of students while in school, but will be optional" and "six foot distancing is not required for classroom seating — a lesser distance is acceptable." This advice was issued despite the state and CDC recommendations that people wear masks in any congregant setting and maintain social distancing of at least six feet. At the same time the county spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on face shields for students and staff, despite there being no studies on their preventative effectiveness in long-exposure settings. Is putting our children and educators at risk unavoidable, or local mismanagement?

Here in Bucks County, our Department of Health no longer issues daily reporting on key statistics like infection rates, number of those ill, and number of deaths, despite the state and surrounding counties updating those numbers to the public on a daily basis. The Bucks County

website states that it updates numbers each Tuesday and Friday, but the last update was made 10 days ago. Is keeping Bucks residents in the dark unavoidable, or local mismanagement?

Here in Bucks County, one media outlet reports that as of Nov. 18, "the county has been unable to keep up with contact tracing due to the sheer number of COVID-19 cases." Was this unavoidable, or local mismanagement?

Here in Bucks County, our schools districts have been left to decide for themselves if they should remain open during this spike in transition rates, while other surrounding counties made the decision last week that it is safest to have schools closed. Was this choice to go a different route from our neighbors unavoidable, or local mismanagement?

And here in Bucks County, my friend who worked at the polls on Election Day and came into contact with hundreds of people was forced to wait nearly a week to get tested after showing symptoms. Was having a fractured, haphazard testing system unavoidable, or due to local mismanagement?

Here in Bucks County, I am immune-suppressed, and dare not leave my house because of the decisions made by the Bucks County Department of Health.

And I don't think this was unavoidable.

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