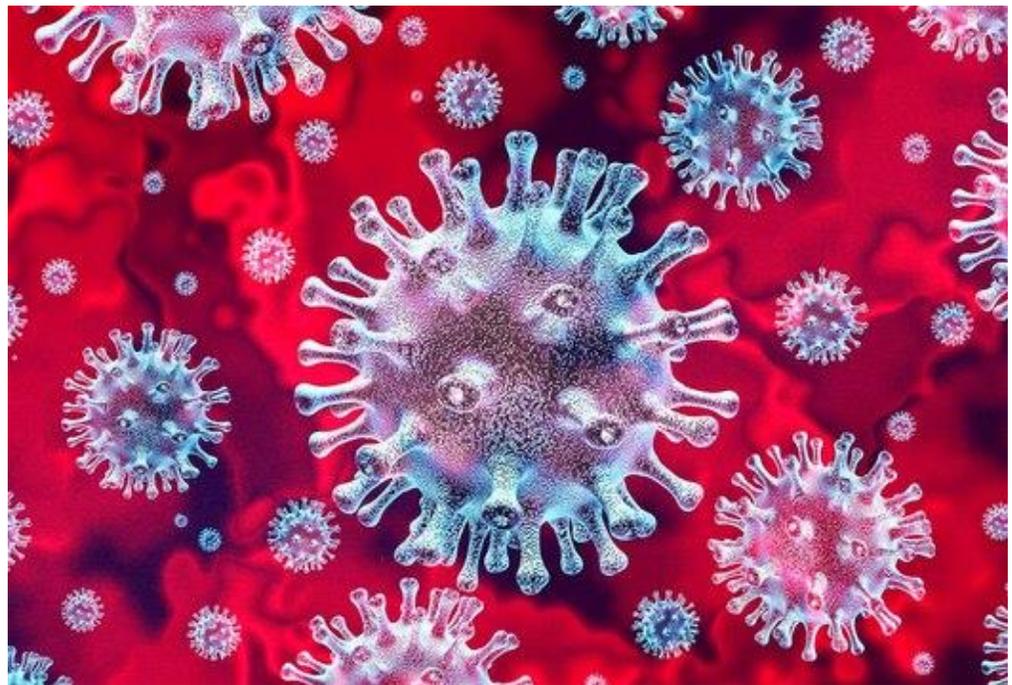


HOW PENNSYLVANIA'S MUNICIPALITIES AND LOCAL OFFICIALS CONFRONT THE CORONAVIRUS



(PHOTO/ISTOCK)

May 2020

A Public Report

PennState



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How Pennsylvania's Municipalities and Local Officials Confront the Coronavirus

A PUBLIC REPORT

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

In normal times, local municipal officials guide community decisions, oversee governmental functions, and represent residents' concerns. During the coronavirus pandemic, local officials have faced increased demands and new challenges. We set out to understand the experiences and struggles of local officials, as well as describe the capacities and responses of their municipalities, in order to help them respond more effectively to the coronavirus. We hope this report helps state officials, public health authorities, and others understand what is occurring at the local level across Pennsylvania.

A total of 1,386 officials from 906 municipalities completed the 2020 Pennsylvania Coronavirus Local Preparedness and Collaboration Survey between May 1st, the day Governor Wolf announced the county reopening schedule, and May 11th, 2020. The survey is representative of senior elected municipality leaders (mayors, presidents, chairpersons, supervisors, councilmembers, commissioners) and executive appointed staff (manager, secretaries) in all Pennsylvania municipalities, except Philadelphia. The response rate was 22.5%.

Report download location: https://democracy.psu.edu/covid_report

Recommended Citation:

Ortiz, Selena E., Gary J. Adler Jr., and Eric Plutzer. 2020. "How Pennsylvania's Municipalities and Local Officials Confront the Coronavirus: A Public Report." *McCourtney Institute for Democracy, Penn State University*.

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SECTION 1: OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Findings

- **The state's response.** A majority (58%) of local officials thought the state's response to the outbreak was excellent or good.
- **State-local coordination.** Local officials were split on whether the state was coordinating well with local municipalities. Some local officials thought the state should have more direct communication with municipalities, clearer criteria for reopening, and improved guidance for how municipalities should function in a crisis.
- **Communication difficulties.** Nearly half of local officials felt unprepared to communicate with their residents about the coronavirus and efforts to address the coronavirus.
- **Local concerns.** Local officials were extremely concerned about near-term unemployment (45%) and business failure (44%). Looking to the next six months, they were extremely concerned about unemployment (33%) and voting problems (21%) in their municipalities.
- **Slow reopening.** The large majority of local officials did not want schools (86%), restaurants and bars (85%), or houses of worship (79%) to reopen immediately.
- **Insufficient testing and tracing.** Only a small minority of municipalities (17%) reported that the capacity for coronavirus testing and contact tracing in their municipality was adequate.
- **Decent fiscal outlook for some.** The large majority of municipalities did not plan to raise taxes (77%), increase fees (79%), or furlough more employees in the next six months (78%).
- **Officials' disease prevention behaviors.** Most local officials were adhering to state and CDC guidelines in their personal behavior.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Provide accessible and relevant data.** Most municipalities lack robust municipal or county health departments that can disseminate and interpret local coronavirus information. Local officials want to be provided with targeted data about coronavirus infections in their communities that is easy to access and interpret.
2. **Make available effective messaging tools.** Local officials may be the only government representative that residents will engage with. Municipalities need better communication tools to immediately share the state's recommendations and actions with local residents.
3. **Provide a forum to highlight local efforts to combat the coronavirus.** Local officials are crucial policy actors for effectively confronting the coronavirus. The efforts taken by municipalities and local officials to safeguard the health of the community should be publicized.

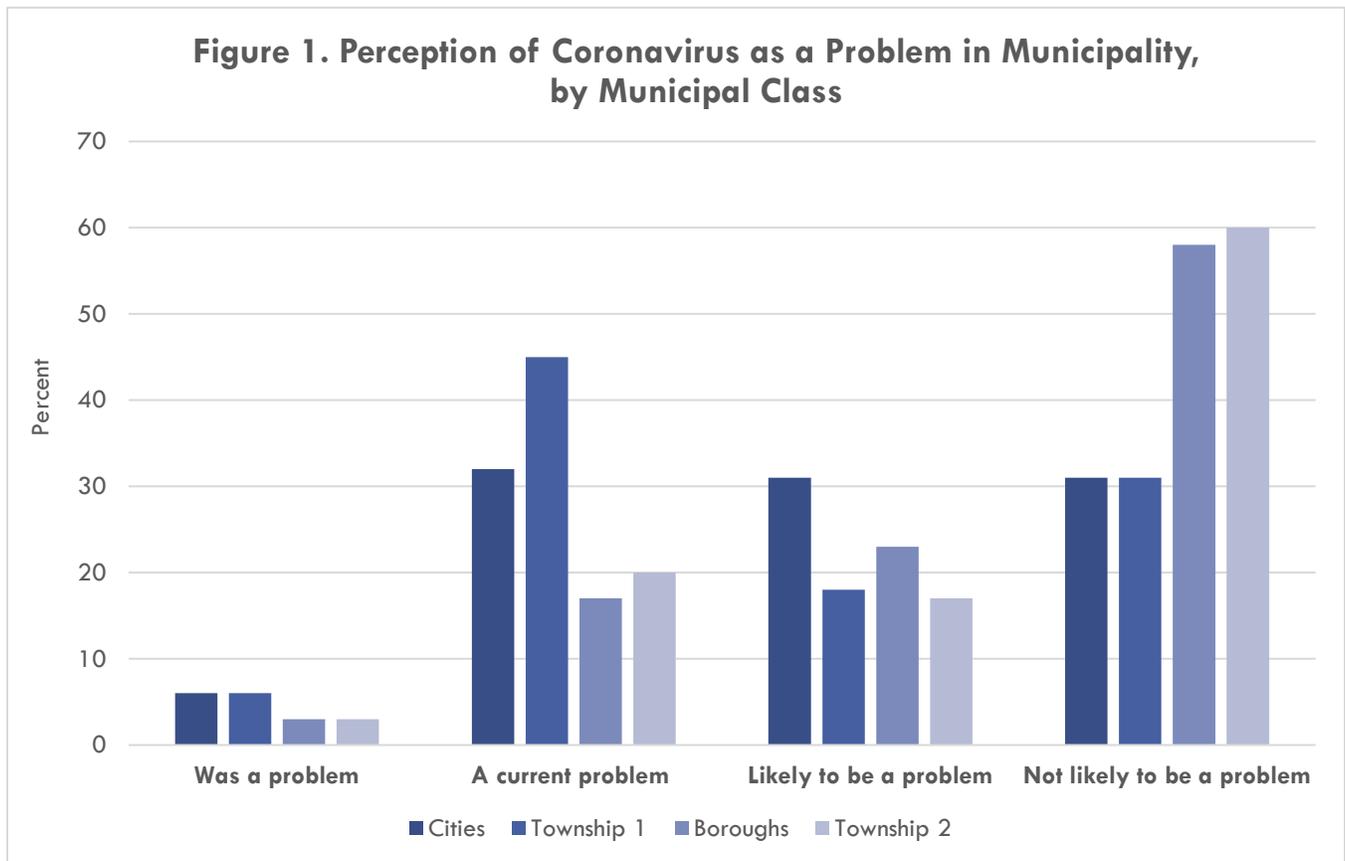
4. **Create opportunities to directly engage and communicate with local officials.** Local officials are concerned about the capacity to conduct contact tracing and testing in their communities, but many also believe that the coronavirus will never become a serious problem. Inviting local officials to have a seat at the table will help to cultivate trust and collaborative efforts to jointly combat the pandemic.
5. **Develop tailored emergency preparedness plans that can be readily implemented.** Relying on other municipalities can lead to frustration and inaction. Local officials need templates to develop plans that can be adjusted to accommodate a municipality's size and staffing capacity.
6. **Develop guidelines on how to conduct local government operations.** The essential duties carried out by local governments directly affect their residents. Local officials need clear protocols and instructions about how to perform regular municipal functions during a disaster.
7. **Provide essential resources.** Local officials struggled to obtain PPE, thermometers, and sanitizer for frontline workers and municipal employees. Municipalities need assistance in securing basic, necessary supplies in a pandemic.

SECTION 2. LOCAL OFFICIALS' CONCERNS, PERCEPTIONS, & LEADERSHIP

Concerns

Local officials were asked whether they thought the coronavirus was a *serious problem* in their municipality, *is likely to become*, or *is not likely to become a serious problem* (Fig. 1).

While a quarter (23%) thought the coronavirus was or *is a serious problem* in their municipality, over half (57%) of local officials thought that the coronavirus was *not likely to become a serious problem*. Local officials in boroughs and 2nd class townships were significantly more likely to think that the coronavirus was *not likely to be a serious problem* ($p < .01$).



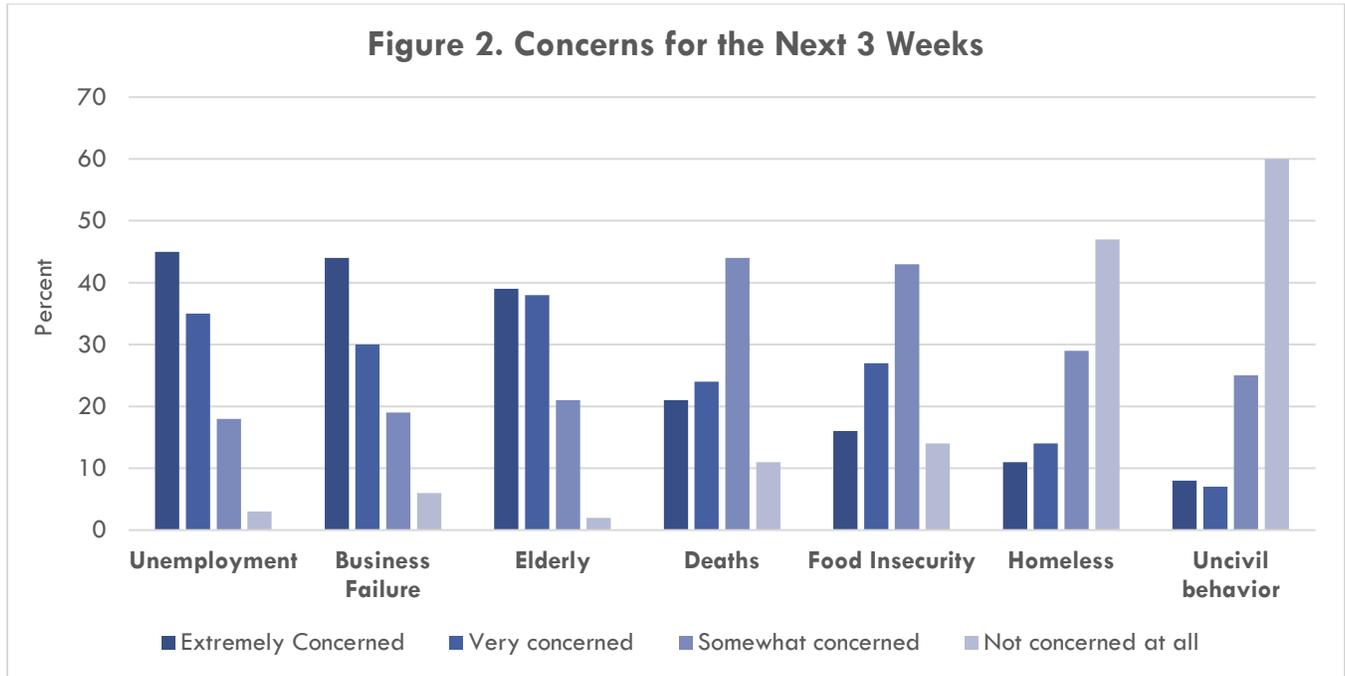
Immediate Concerns for the Municipality

Local officials were asked to rate their level of concern about impacts the coronavirus might have in the next three weeks on their municipality (Fig. 2).¹

Local officials had extreme levels of concerns regarding unemployment (45%), business failure (44%), and the elderly (39%). Local officials had lower levels of extreme concern for the number of residents who might die (22%), food insecurity (16%), the homeless (11%), and uncivil behavior towards racial/ethnic minorities (8%).

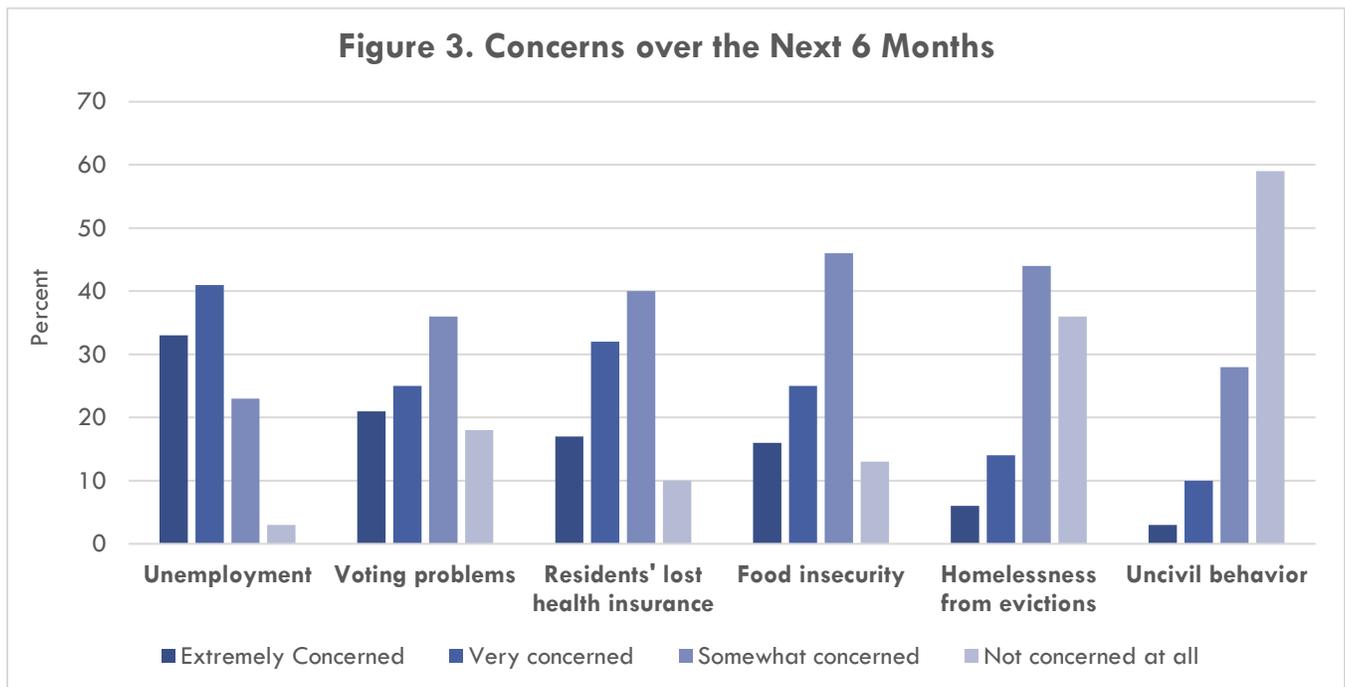
¹ Half the sample was asked these questions.

Local officials in cities and 1st class townships had significantly higher levels of concern regarding unemployment ($p<.05$), business failure ($p<.05$), and the homeless ($p<.001$).



Future Concerns for the Municipality

Local officials were asked to rate their level of concern about the impacts the coronavirus might have in the next six months on their municipality (Fig. 3).² Local officials had extreme levels of concern regarding



² Half the sample was asked these questions.

unemployment (33%), then voting problems (21%), loss of health insurance among residents (17%), food insecurity (16%), homelessness from evictions (5%), and uncivil behavior towards racial/ethnic minorities (4%).

Perceptions of Response and Reopening

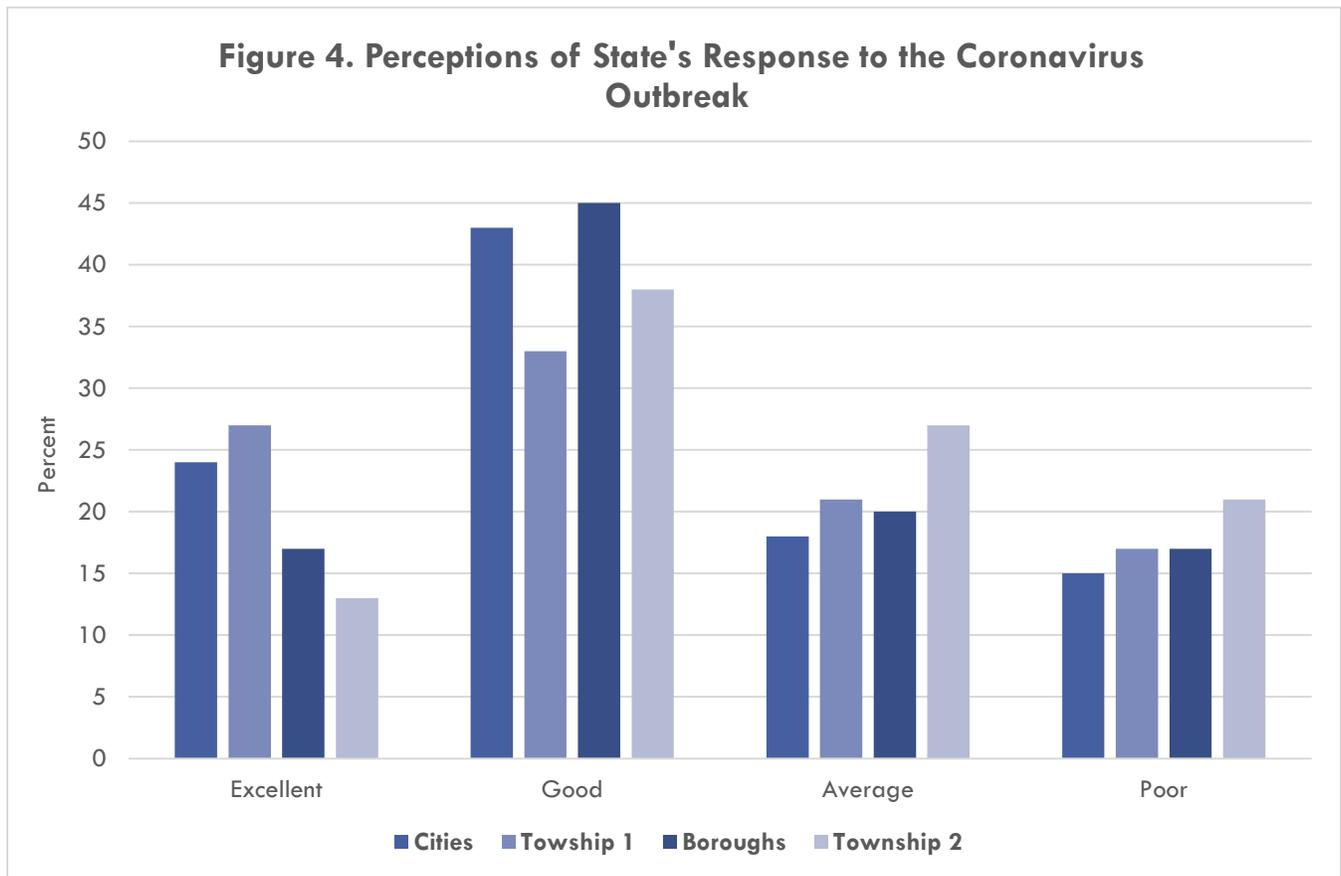
We asked a number of questions about local officials' perceptions of the state's response, the social institutions they trust to respond to the coronavirus, and when they thought municipalities should reopen.

State's Response

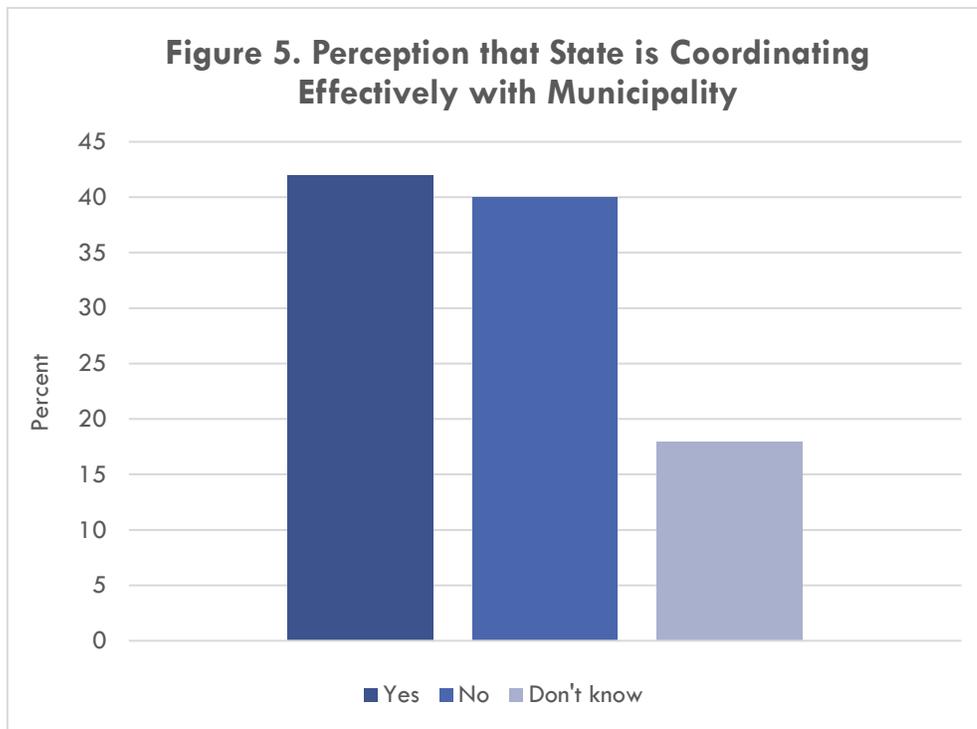
Local officials were asked, "How would you rate the response of the state government to the coronavirus outbreak?" (Fig. 4.)

A minority (16%) reported the state had done an *excellent* job and nearly half (42%) thought the state had done a *good* job. About 1 in 5 (19%) believed the state had done a *poor* job.

Local officials from cities and 1st class townships were significantly more likely to report that the state's response was *excellent* ($p < .01$).



Local officials were also asked whether "the state government is coordinating effectively with local governments?" (Fig. 5). Their responses were split, with 42% responding *yes*, 40% responding *no*, and 18% responding *don't know*.



How the State can Coordinate More Effectively with Municipalities

Local officials who answered *no* or *don't know* to the question of whether the state was coordinating effectively with their municipality were asked a follow-up question for which they could type a response: “How could the state coordinate more effectively with local governments?” Responses were grouped into three emergent themes: direct communication with state officials, access to data, and guidance on municipal affairs.

More Direct Communication with State Officials

Several local officials commented that they would have liked the option to have direct communication with the Governor and state health officials:

“There needs to be better channels of communication with the local municipalities.”
– Male, Councilmember, Borough

“More conversations with municipalities. Not just state or county representatives.”
– Female, Secretary, 2nd class Township

Local officials stated that direct communication would have helped to clarify state directives and provide support in municipalities’ efforts to uphold executive orders:

“While we get email updates from the county on general information, specific information geared to smaller townships and their unique problems has been hard to obtain. Also shut down orders have been unclear with various loopholes (such as what is landscaping versus earthwork activities) [and] have made it hard for our police coverage to enforce.”
– Male, President, 2nd class Township

“There has been very little direct communication with local government from the state. There has also been little or no authority for enforcement, clarification of local authority, or unambiguous guidance as to what is a legally enforceable regulation vis-a-vis a recommendation or guidance. With little or no assistance from the state, it has been very difficult to communicate with community members about the expectations, and there is inconsistency across municipalities with respect to communication and enforcement.”

– Male, Manager, Borough

In their view, direct communication would also have helped to reduce miscommunication and entrust municipalities in developing strategies to address the coronavirus:

“Rather than issue haphazard executive orders that are to be enforced by local agencies and then provide guidance a week later, it would be nice of the Governor to coordinate with the local agencies first.”

– Male, Manager, 2nd class Township

“Keep us more informed. Be more specific with where we fall in the regulations. Acknowledge us as front-line workers. Include local govt. in stimulus packages to help cover fees like PPE that is Covid-related, ads to change/cancel meetings related to Covid-19 restrictions.”

– Female, Secretary, 2nd class Township

Although many commented on the helpfulness of working with county Emergency Management coordinators, several noted this did not serve as a sufficient substitute for direct correspondence with the state:

“County EMA's were not prepared to deal with the unknown, and they did reach out, but there are holes in the framework. The state needs to do a better job, communicating.”

– Female, Secretary, 1st class Township

“More communication directly with municipality officials versus emergency coordinators only...”

– Male, President, Borough

More Access to Targeted and Streamlined Data

Local officials emphasized the need to have data specific to their municipality and its residents:

“We have had a lack of transparency in our county with regard to a nursing facility. Apparently, the state health department gets information but the county and its municipalities have been left a bit in the dark.”

– Female, Councilmember, Borough

“Population density as well as the rural and urban make up of specific municipalities need to play more of a role in determining business shut downs, etc. I'm not certain that the population and demographic makeup is being considered for individual municipalities.”

– Female, Secretary, 2nd class Township

“There are miscommunications between Governor's office and DOH. I receive different statistics from county, state, federal governments.”

– Male, Mayor, Borough

Such information would make it useful for local officials to know which municipalities were most at-risk for the coronavirus:

“Communicate with those municipalities who may be in an area with low-population density but have a high percentage of residents who are identified as at-risk populations. As far as I know, we on the council have not been provided information on the statistics for our municipality.”

– Female, Councilmember, Borough

There were also suggestions that the dissemination of data, information, and recommendations be streamlined and targeted for their communities:

“The abundance of e-mail reports is overwhelming. The updates on restrictions from the governor’s office would be better if somehow the new changes were highlighted. We get notices of changes and then get a long document and when we read and evaluate, areas of concern have in fact remained the same. This wastes our time and puts unnecessary fear into residents as we pass the information along.”

– Male, Councilmember, 2nd class Township

Relatedly, local officials also noted the difficulty in efficiently processing large amounts of information with limited personnel:

“We have a few supervisors, and one part-time secretary treasurer—not a large staff to review material in detail searching for changes.”

– Male, Councilmember, 2nd class Township

More Guidance on Conducting Municipal Business

Local officials were very concerned about their ability to conduct critical municipal business as required. Many recommended that clear guidance regarding how best to carry on the functions of their office during these times was needed:

“Although the state’s response was good overall, coordination with municipal governments could have been improved with better guidance on statutorily mandated timelines and meeting requirements. For example, applications before the Zoning Hearing Board must be heard within a mandated timeframe. Zoning Hearing Board cases are quasi-judicial and evidence is presented and entered into a formal record. It is difficult to hold these types of meetings in a virtual format given the fact that exhibits are presented and must be examined. Although platforms like Zoom make this possible, it is far less than ideal. If certain timeframes were to be extended, then perhaps traditional meetings could occur.”

– Male, Councilmember, 2nd class Township

“It took weeks for us to receive permission to have council meetings virtually (without a physical quorum). That should have been handled more quickly.”

– Female, Councilmember, Borough

“I think there could have been more guidance on how local governments should proceed in conducting business (i.e. is it really legal to conduct meetings via Zoom?)”

– Male, Secretary, Borough

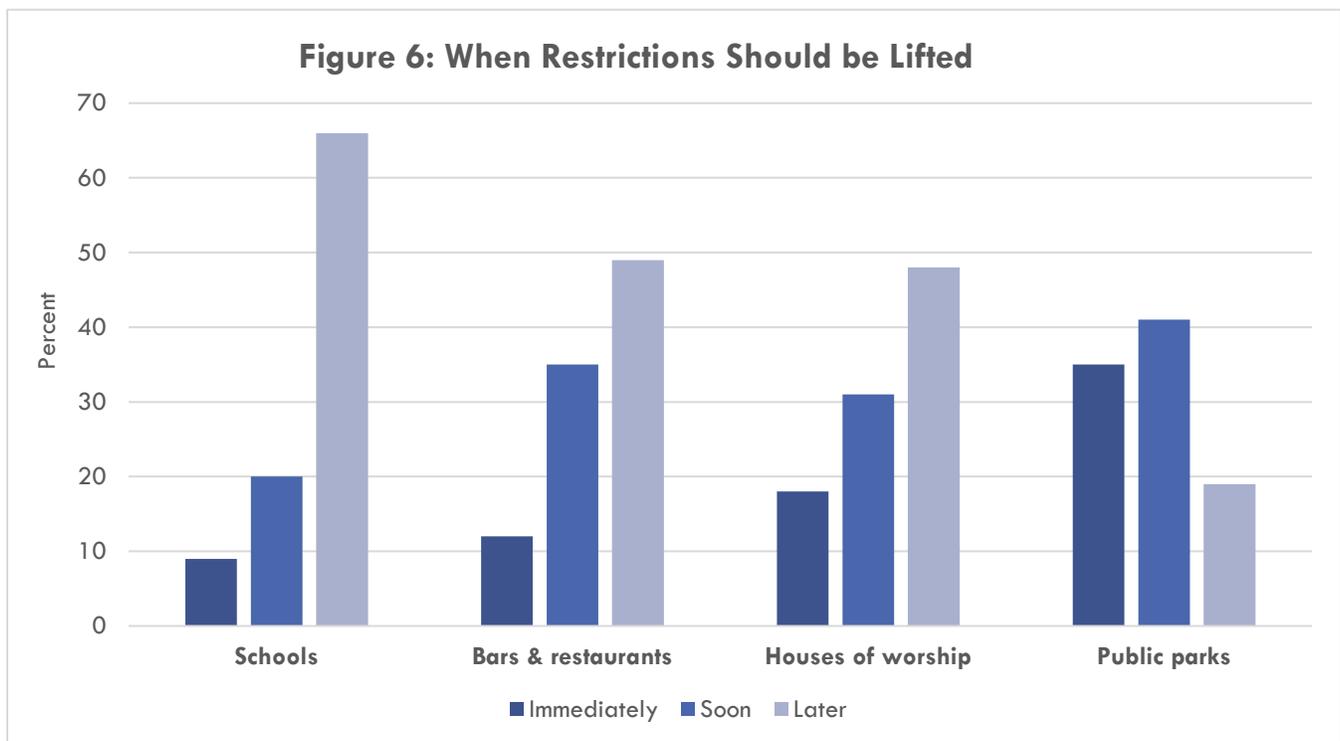
Information and Trust

Local officials varied in the institutions they trusted to respond effectively to the coronavirus. The most trusted social institution was “nearby medical facilities,” with half (49%) of local officials reporting a *great deal of trust* in these. The next highest trusted institution was “the CDC”, with about half (44%) of local officials reporting a *great deal of trust*. About a third (35%) trusted “county health officials” a *great deal*. There were no significant differences in trust in these social institutions by municipal class.

In contrast to non-partisan public health organizations, the most visible elected officials – President Donald Trump and Governor Tom Wolf – were trusted less overall. Only about a third (31%) trusted Governor Wolf a *great deal* and only one in four (26%) trusted President Trump a *great deal*. But it is difficult to know how much negative sentiment, towards either executive, is a reflection of partisan polarization. What is clear is that at least some elected officials view the pronouncements of at least one of these chief executives with a degree of skepticism.

Reopening Municipalities

We asked local officials when restrictions should be lifted on schools, bars and restaurants, house of worship, and public parks (Fig. 6). Local officials were most supportive of opening public parks *immediately* (35%), followed by houses of worship (18%), bars & restaurants (12%), and schools (9%).



We observed three patterns in local officials’ responses about reopening.

First, only a small minority of local officials wanted to reopen quickly.

Second, local officials in the first counties allowed to reopen preferred different reopening times for some social institutions. They were significantly more likely to support the immediate reopening of bars and restaurants ($p < .10$), as well as houses of worship ($p < .01$).

Third, local officials from 2nd class townships were significantly more likely to support earlier openings for each type of social institution compared to other municipality classes ($p < .01$). Even so, only 23% of 2nd class township officials thought that houses of worship should be opened *immediately* and only 15% thought bars and restaurants should be opened *immediately*.

Local Officials’ Leadership

We asked whether local officials felt prepared to communicate with their residents about the coronavirus, as well as what disease prevention behaviors they were personally practicing.

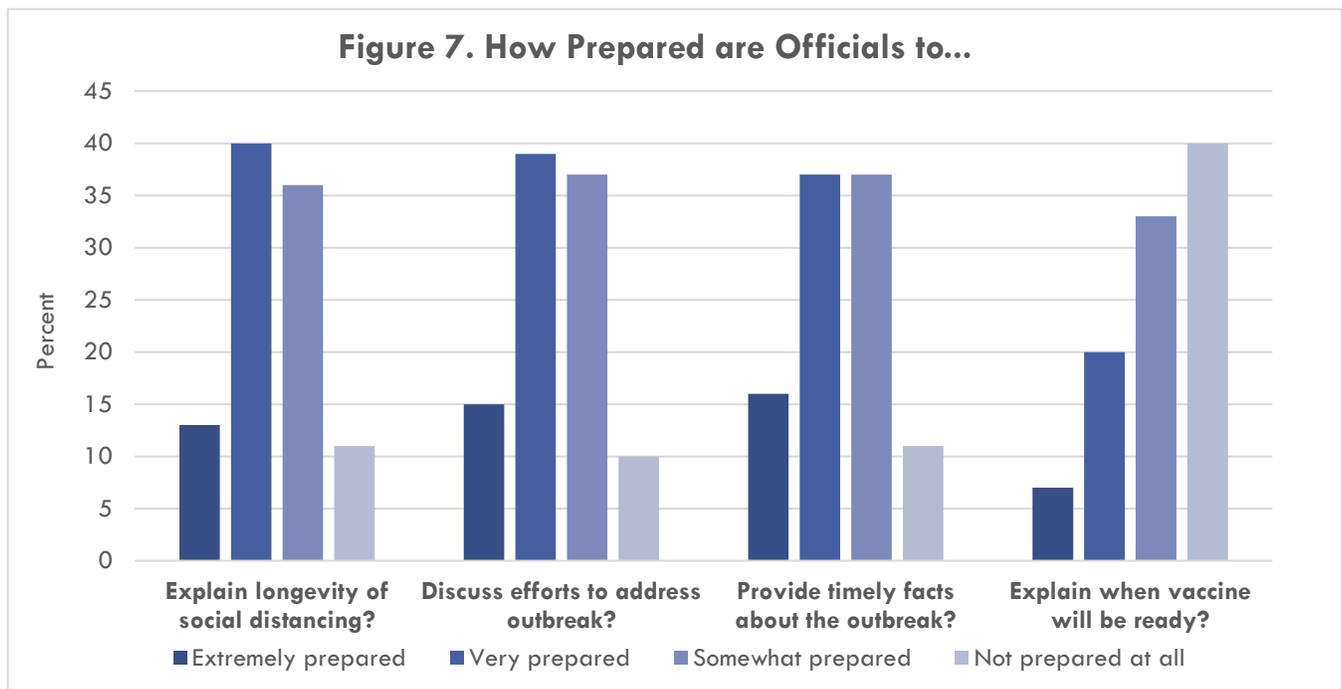
Communication Preparedness

Only a slim majority of local officials felt sufficiently prepared for communicating to residents in their municipality about the outbreak (Fig. 7). These patterns did not significantly differ by municipality class.

16% said they were *extremely prepared* and 37% said they were *very prepared* to “provide timely facts about the coronavirus outbreak.”

15% said they were *extremely prepared* and 39% said they were *very prepared* to “provide information about what is being done to address the coronavirus outbreak.”

13% said they were *extremely prepared* and 40% felt *very prepared* to “explain how long social distancing must continue to be practiced.”



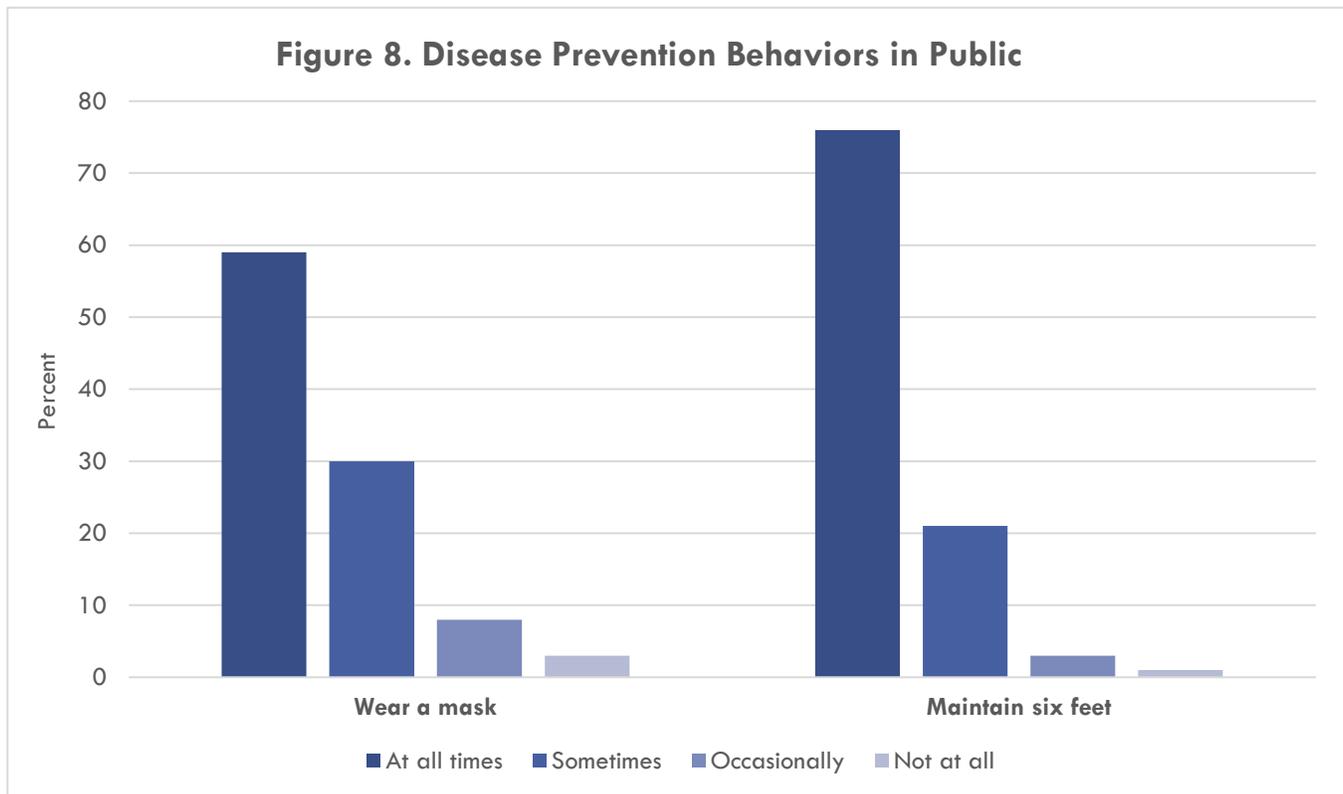
Personal Activities

We asked local officials about their personal activities in the previous week (Fig. 8). We observed three patterns.

First, a majority of local officials were extensively isolating. More than half (55%) reported *staying at home except for short walks or errands*, while 2% reported *not leaving home at all*.

Second, when local officials were away from home, they were generally participating in the disease prevention behaviors recommended by the state and the CDC. The large majority (76%) of local officials reported that they tried to stay six feet or more away from other people *at all times*. More than half (59%) reported wearing a mask *at all times*.

Third, only a very small minority appeared to be actively not adhering to the guidelines: only 3% reported *not wearing a mask at all* and only 1% reported *not trying to stay six feet or more away from other at all*.



Finally, we asked local officials about their own, personal experiences with the coronavirus.

A minority of local officials (31%) knew someone who had been diagnosed with the coronavirus.

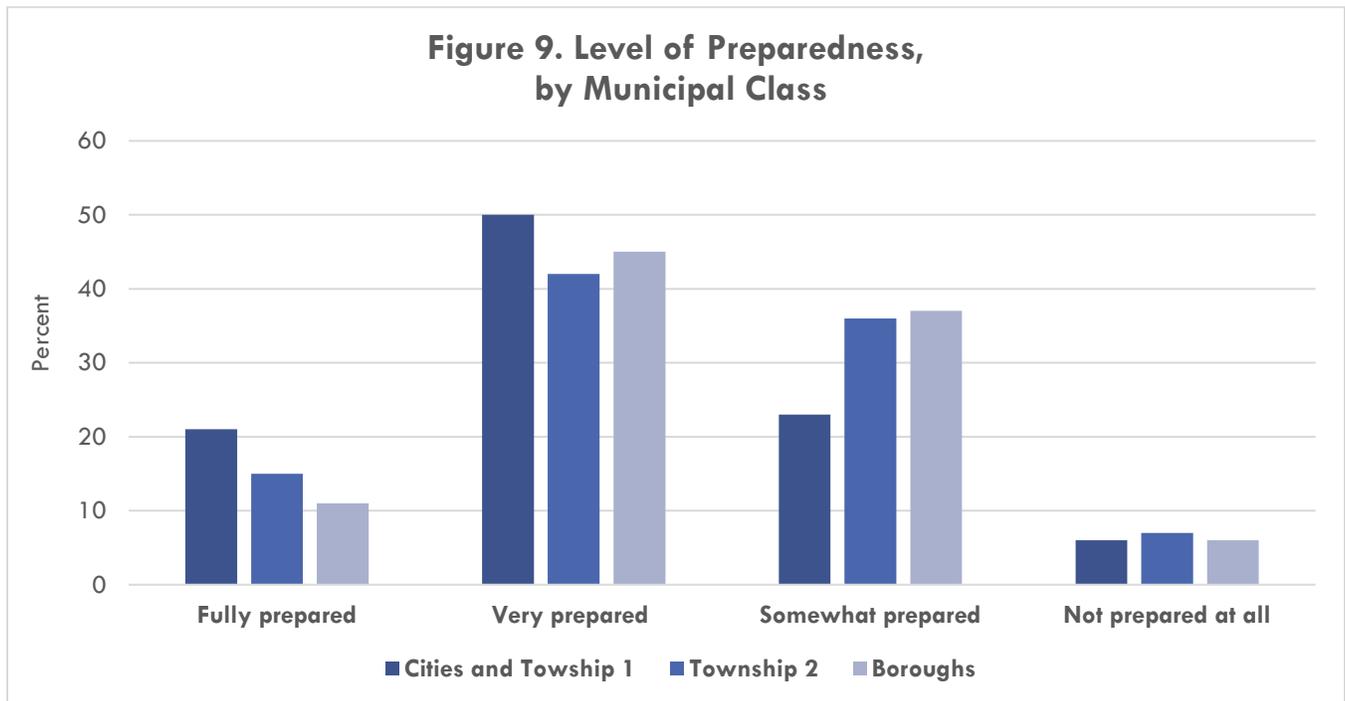
A minority of local officials (27%) were *very or extremely concerned* about getting the coronavirus. Local officials who were 65 years old or older were more likely to be *very or extremely concerned* ($p < .01$). Still, a quarter of local officials (27%) 65 or older were *not concerned at all*.

SECTION 3: MUNICIPALITIES’ PREPAREDNESS, ACTIONS, & FUTURE PLANS

Municipal Preparedness

We asked local officials about ways that municipalities might have prepared before the outbreak. About one fifth (19%) had a pandemic response plan in place prior to the pandemic and half (49%) had an emergency partnership with another municipality in place prior to the pandemic.

We also asked local officials, “How prepared is your municipality to respond to new diagnosed cases of coronavirus in the next few weeks?” (Fig. 9). We found that municipalities varied in their level of preparedness, with only a minority (14%) of municipalities reporting being *fully prepared* and almost half being *very prepared*. The pattern was similar for municipalities of all sizes.



What Municipalities Need to be Better Prepared

Local officials who answered that their municipality was *somewhat prepared* or *not at all prepared* were asked a follow-up question for which they could type a response: “How could your municipality be better prepared?” Responses were grouped into four emergent themes: access to resources, guidance for response, the ability to independently respond, and responsibility for response.

More Access to Resources

In their responses, some local officials raised issues of particular concern to rural municipalities, such as the lack of nearby medical facilities and emergency services, which would impede their ability to respond to patients with the coronavirus in a timely manner:

“We do not have any hospitals or fire companies in our township so anyone that is sick with Covid-19 symptoms drives to a hospital in the county or another county.”

- Female, Secretary, 2nd class Township

“Being a rural community without real medical availability...we have to rely on remote services for service or transportation in cases of emergency.”

- Male, President, Borough

Other concerns pertained to access to the most recent *information and data* on coronavirus cases and recommendations: “The State and County need to supply accurate and reliable data...”³. Many were concerned about access to *personal protective equipment*: “Our EMS workers waited for Personal protection equipment...[we] were unable to get supplies to our township workers...”⁴ One local official raised these concerns together:

“We have no thermometers...We get no information as to who has the virus & where they live. People who work in one of our nursing homes have accounts of many more cases and deaths than are reported. Facebook is not our friend.”

- Female, Manager, 2nd class Township

Some officials reported having to purchase masks and other equipment with their own money. Another official was blunt about the financial pressures of the coronavirus response, commenting that their municipality needed:

“Significantly more funds to compensate for tremendous losses and increased costs.”

- Female, Councilmember, 1st class Township

Municipalities were concerned about access to coronavirus testing (both in regard to frontline workers and the general public) and contact tracing:

“More testing particularly for those residents who are still working to serve the public.”

- Male, Councilmember, Borough

“We could be better prepared by having a testing plan in place for our small community. Although we have had [few] cases in a [small] population of residents and we are in a rural area, since there is no testing of asymptomatic persons we do not know the actual number of residents that could be infected. Our area is primarily an older, at-risk population and this is a concern for them.”

- Female, Councilmember, Borough

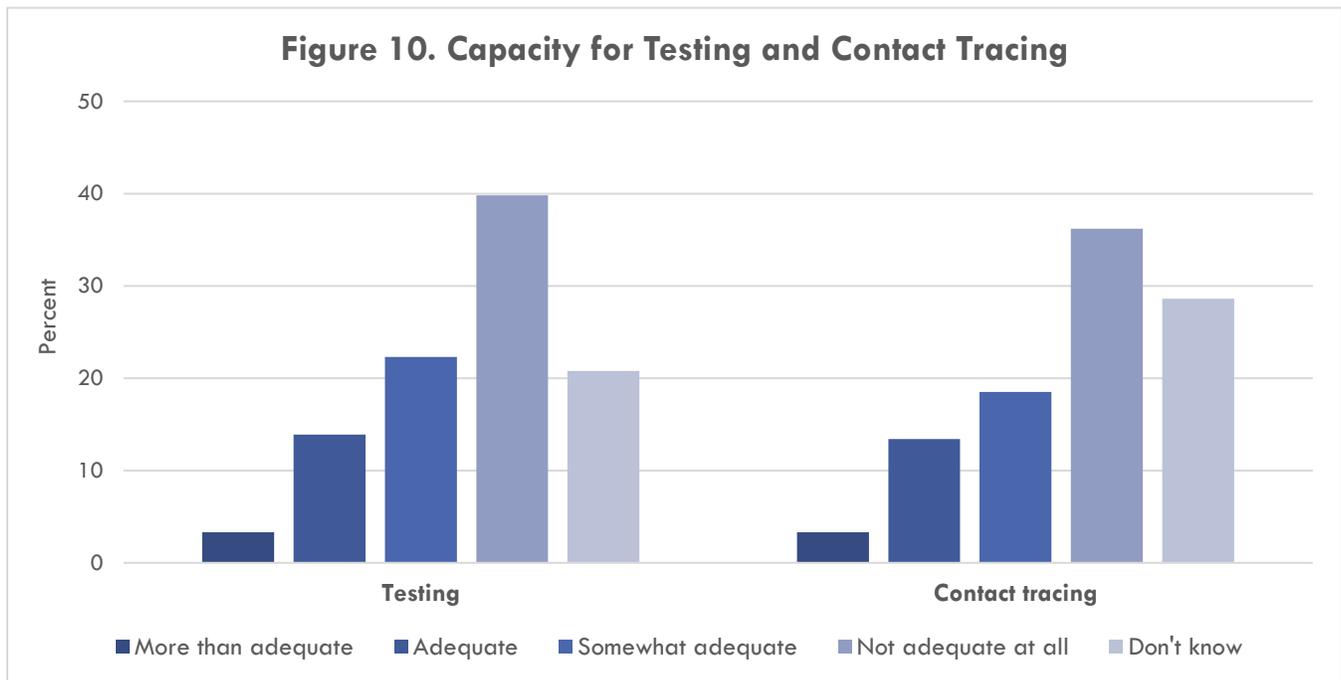
These concerns align with survey results about local officials’ perception of the capacity for conducting coronavirus testing and contact tracing in their municipality (Fig. 10). Notably, these answers did not differ by municipality class.

Only 17% of municipalities declared that the capacity to conduct contact tracing was *more than adequate* or *adequate*. More than one-third (36%) said tracing capacity was *not adequate at all*.

³ Male, Councilmember, 2nd class Township

⁴ Female, Councilmember, 2nd class Township

Only 17% of municipalities declared that the capacity to conduct coronavirus testing was *more than adequate* or *adequate*. Almost half (40%) said testing capacity was *not adequate at all*.



More Guidance for Response

Many local officials felt that they lacked either the guidance or the power to enforce stay-at-home orders and shuttering of businesses, and needed guidance on how best to encourage social distancing efforts:

“When issuing ‘guidance’, [the] state also needs to issue enforcement expectations and particulars to municipal governments.”

- Male, Manager, 2nd class Township

“We also need more specific guidance from the state as to enforcement authority and clarification of regulations vis-a-vis guidance or recommendations.”

- Male, Manager, Borough

“Also the county and local record officials have not been forthcoming in providing support for social distancing and use of masks as requested by the governor.”

- Female, Councilmember, Borough

Ability to Respond Independently

Some local officials raised concerns about having to rely on other municipalities to manage response to the coronavirus:

“We don't have a written policy for responding to health emergencies. We rely on the neighboring township emergency management dept for responding to all emergencies and

information received from them. The county health dept and the state often seem contradictory or after the fact.”

- Female, Councilmember, Borough

Some local officials discussed having to rely upon policies and procedures developed for larger municipalities that proved too complex and burdensome to be implemented in their smaller municipalities, especially given the availability of resources:

“We are a VERY small municipality and have to wear many hats just to keep things running. We do not have a separate team to help keep up-to-date with every change in real time so the pressure to have everything ready is overwhelming...We have to rely heavily on the larger municipalities to carry the load for us, which often results in policies and procedures that are too cumbersome for us to initiate...”

- Female, Manager, 2nd class Township

Questioning Local Responsibility

Lastly, there were conflicting beliefs among local officials in regard to their overall responsibility for addressing the coronavirus, with some local officials strongly asserting that responding to the coronavirus went above and beyond their purview:

“Responding to COVID cases is NOT a local government function!!!”

- Male, Manager, Borough

“We run the township we are not doctors...”

- Female, Councilmember, 2nd class Township

“I personally do not believe we are going to be able to make a significant impact on the number of citizens who eventually get this disease”

- Male, Manager, 1st class Township

Actions

Actions taken by Municipalities

We asked about the types of actions municipalities had taken in response to the coronavirus (Fig. 11). Since the beginning of the pandemic, 78% of municipalities had declared a municipal emergency, 3% had announced a municipal eviction housing ban, 16% had furloughed employees, and 20% reported participating in the “Bells Across Pennsylvania Day”.⁵

Response actions varied significantly by municipality class, with 31% of cities and 1st class townships reporting furloughing employees, compared to 13% of boroughs, 17% of 2nd class townships ($p < .001$).

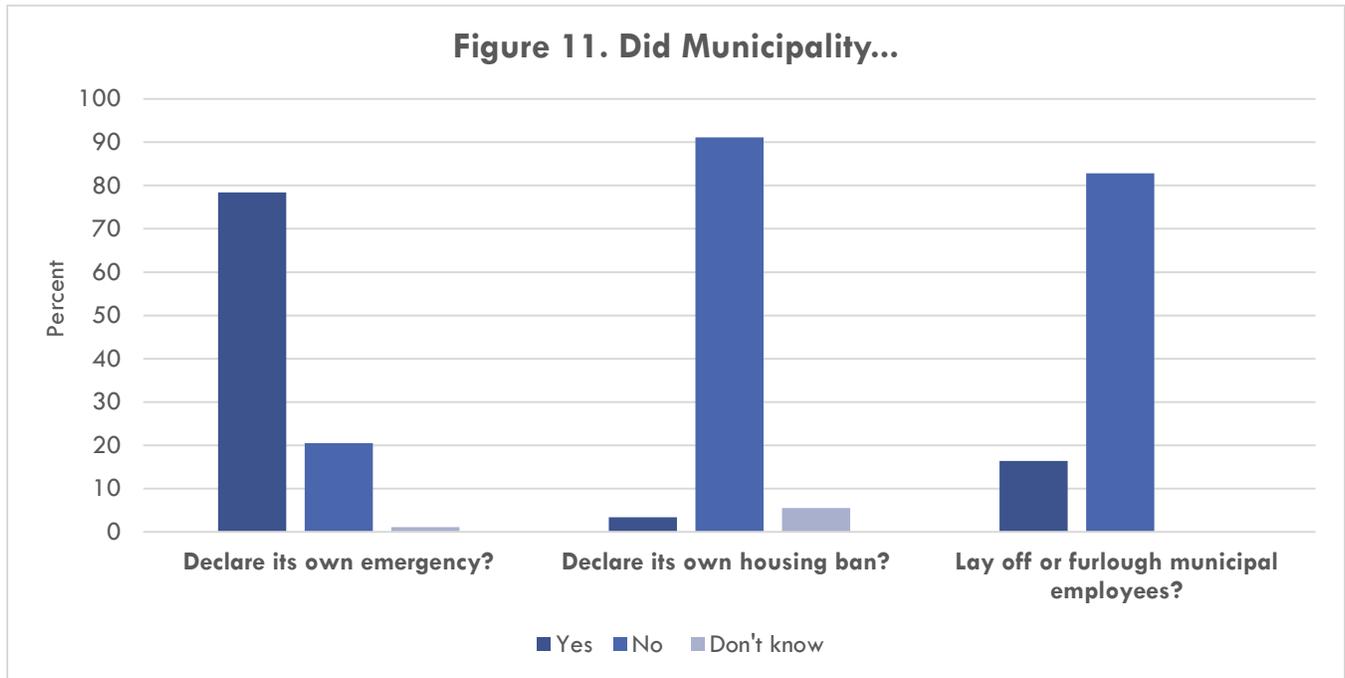
Response to State Closure Guidelines

Municipalities reported that businesses and residents were responding differently to state closure guidelines (Fig. 12).⁶

⁵ This event was organized by the Pennsylvania State Mayors' Association to use the ringing of bells on May 3rd to honor those affected by and responding to the coronavirus outbreak.

⁶ Half the sample was asked these questions.

More than half (61%) of municipalities reported that *nearly all* businesses were following state closure guidelines, but just 18% reported that *nearly all* residents were following the state's stay-at-home order. About 85% of municipalities reported that *nearly all* houses of worship were closed. Notably, there was no significant variation by municipality class in these responses.



Municipalities differed some in how they perceived the closures and the stay-at-home orders helping to slow the spread of the coronavirus (Fig.13).⁷

Less than half of municipalities (46%) thought that business closures helped a *great deal*, with 15% reporting that business closures helped *not at all*. Just over half of municipalities (56%) thought that the stay-at-home order helped a *great deal*, with 8% reporting that it helped *not at all*. Notably, there was *no* significant variation by municipality class in these responses.

⁷ Half the sample was asked these questions.

Figure 12. Adherence to State Closure Policies

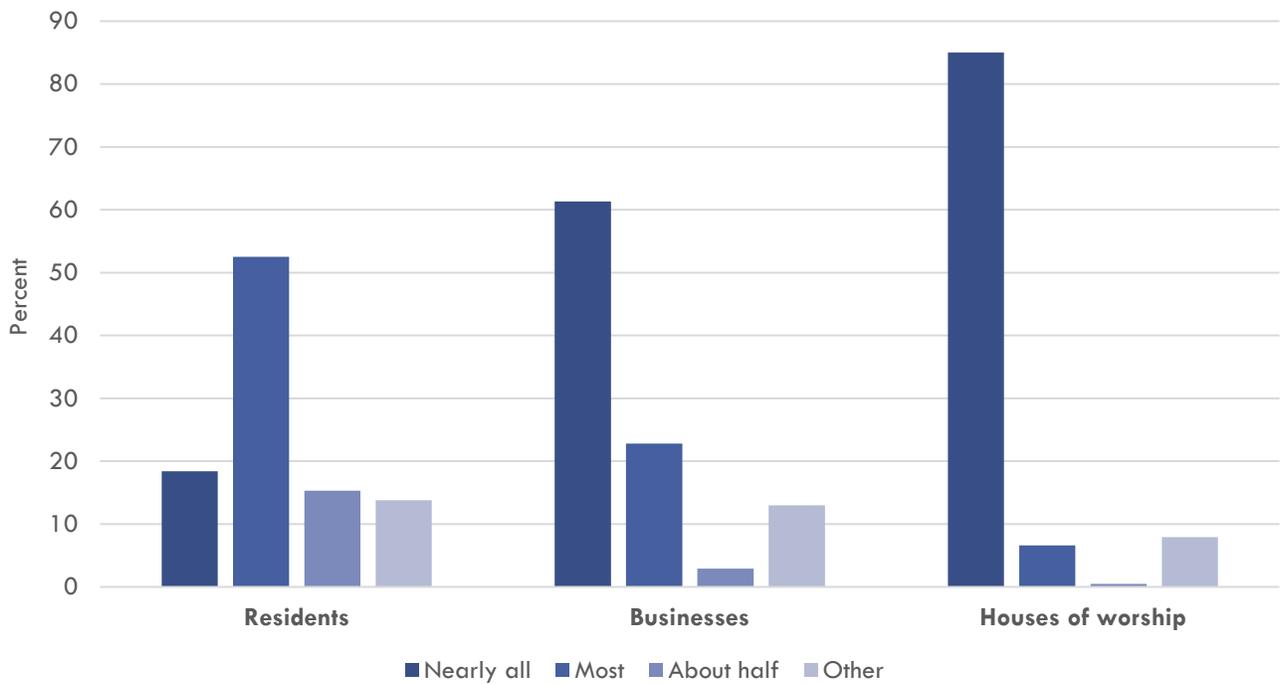
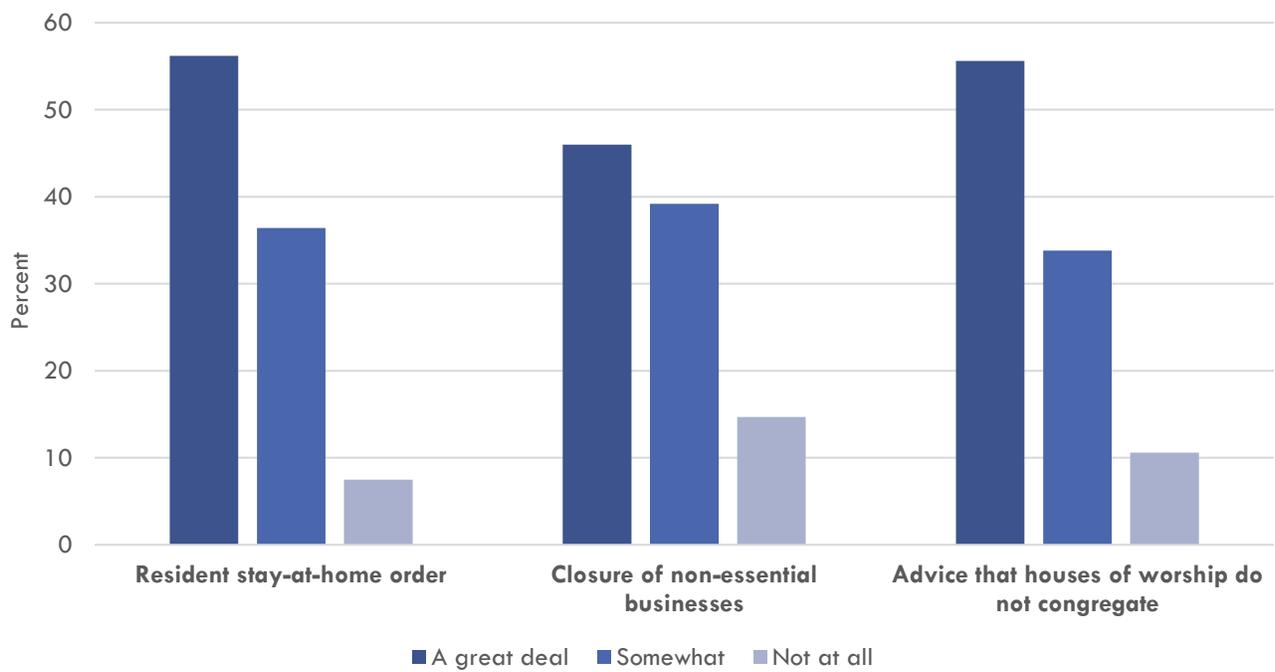


Figure 13. Effectiveness of Efforts to Slow Spread



Going Forward

Possible Future Actions by Municipalities

We asked about the types of actions that municipalities might be likely to take in the next six months to mitigate the financial impact of the coronavirus. The large majority of municipalities did *not* report concerns about the fiscal effects of the coronavirus. Only 2% of municipalities thought they were *very likely* or *somewhat likely* to enter the bankruptcy process.

79% were *not likely* to raise service fees. Only 3% were *very likely* to do so.

77% were *not likely* to raise local tax rates. Only 2% were *very likely* to do so.

78% were *not likely* to furlough employees. Only 4% were *very likely* to do so.

These patterns differed significantly by municipality class ($p < .001$), with cities and first-class townships more likely to consider each of these options.

SECTION 4: METHODOLOGY

The *2020 Pennsylvania Coronavirus Local Preparedness and Collaboration Survey* is a representative probability survey of senior elected municipality leaders (mayors, presidents, chairpersons, supervisors, councilmembers, commissioners) and executive appointed staff (manager, secretaries) in all Pennsylvania municipalities, except Philadelphia. The primary purpose of the survey was to gather information about officials' experiences during the first two months of the coronavirus pandemic, including their knowledge, opinions, and behaviors in response to the pandemic. The survey also collected information on municipal preparedness, municipal solutions, and municipal needs. A total of 1,386 officials from 906 municipalities completed the survey between May 1st and May 11th, 2020.

Human Subjects Protection

The study was reviewed by the IRB at Penn State University and classified as "Exempt." In order to ensure informed consent to participate, municipal officials first received introductory information in an email, then comprehensive information about the study after following a link to the survey website. They consented to participation in the survey by clicking the "Next" button at the bottom of the informed consent webpage.

Sampling

The state of Pennsylvania provides a list of all local municipal officials on a state website run by the PA Department of Community & Economic Development. The raw list contains over 50,000 name records. The list receives a major, annual update in mid-February to integrate the previous years' elections outcomes. We downloaded the list on February 14, 2020, after confirmation that the update had processed. We selected all officials classified by codes 1-18 (elected officials) and 30-31 (managers and secretaries). All municipalities were included, except for Philadelphia, which is in a municipality size class of its own.

The initial list had 16,010 records. After removing duplicate names so that every individual would have the same probability of selection into the sample, the list had 15,416 names. Duplicate names were usually the result of elected officials who also held a non-elected municipal role. The 6,874 names that had no email address and the 2,383 that had a shared email address were excluded from the sample. We retained the records of 6,159 officials who had a unique email.

Fieldwork

The survey was designed to be a three-contact, web-only survey. Each person received an invitation email. Three days later, non-respondents received a second email. And three days later, remaining non-respondents received a final email. The survey was left open for four days following the last reminder.

We used the terminology of "coronavirus" in our survey, following a pattern that other survey organizations were using at that time, including the Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll.⁸

To increase the types of questions we could fit on the survey, we used a "split sample" approach such that some questions were only asked of half the sample. Respondents were randomly assigned to these questions.

⁸ The KFF Health Tracking Poll. <https://www.kff.org/tag/tracking-poll/>

Response Rate

We use the American Associations of Public Opinion Research’s (AAPOR) (2016) recommendations for the calculation of response rates. This involves taking the number of useable, returned surveys, divided by the number of all eligible respondents.

Status	Criteria	Number of Cases
Completed survey	100% complete	1,347
Partially completed survey	>=50% complete	39
<i>Total useable surveys</i>		1,386
Incomplete breakoff	Completion progress <50%	232
Eligible non-respondent	No participation	4,541

AAPOR Response Rate 6 (Complete + Partial) / (Complete + Partial) + (Breakoffs + Non-responses) = 1,386/6,159 = 22.5%.

The response rate for the survey was 22.5%.

Weighting for Official-Level Analysis

Our analysis weight for officials is composed of two weights.

Baseweight

First, we correct for unequal representation of municipalities and official position categories in the sample compared to the population. For both the population and the sample, we produced counts of each type of official position (organized into five categories) by type of municipality (four classes). This produced 20 cells (5 X 4), but we removed two cells since the mayor position does not exist for 1st or 2nd class townships. We constructed a ratio of the population total for each cell to the sample total for each cell. The resulting ratios are the baseweights.

Non-response adjustment

Next, we used information available for all cases (political affiliation, sex, municipality class, position, PA health region, and number of Covid-19 cases in county as of 5/1/2020) to calculate the probability of responding with a useable survey. We used a logistic regression model with clustering at the county and municipality levels to predict this probability for each case. We take the inverse of the probabilities to create the non-response weight.

Final weight

A final weight for each case is simply the result of multiplying the baseweight and the non-response adjustment together.

Weighting for Municipal-Level Analysis

To create a dataset of municipalities, we treated survey respondents as key informants of their municipality. Of 2,560 municipalities, officials from 906 municipalities responded. Of these, 480 municipalities were represented by more than one official in the dataset. To create the municipality dataset, we randomly dropped all but one official from these municipalities.

We correct for unequal representation of municipalities in the sample compared to the population. We produced counts of each of the four classes of municipality. We constructed a ratio of the municipal population total for each cell to the municipal sample total for each cell. The resulting ratios are used as the weights.

Margin of Sampling Error

For questions asked of the full sample (N=1,386) the maximum Margin of Sampling Error is ± 2.8 . For questions asked of only half the sample, the maximum Margin of Sampling Error is $\pm 4.1\%$. This includes design effects (DEFT) that account for weighting (typical DEFT for percentages in the report range from 1.00 to 1.10). Sampling error is larger for officials of cities (N=43); for these it is $\pm 14.9\%$.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by seed funding from the Population Research Institute at Penn State University (pop.psu.edu; @psupopresearch), with polling support from the McCourtney Institute of Democracy (democracyinst@psu.edu; @McCourtneyInst). We thank Isaiah Gerber for preparation of the sampling frame and Cynthia Mitchell for data management. We would also like to thank all the local officials who took time and energy to complete the survey.

Contact Information

For more information about this survey, please contact the study investigators at covidsurvey@psu.edu

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