

# Coronavirus Pandemic to Require Patience and Flexibility, SCEMD Director Says

By W. Stuart Morgan III

**T**he coronavirus pandemic began in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, and continues to spread worldwide.

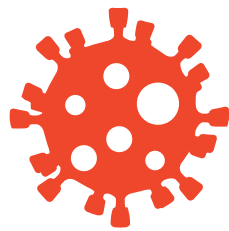
As of May 2, there were 1.14 million confirmed cases of the coronavirus in the United States, which causes the respiratory disease COVID-19, and 66,154 deaths due to the disease. As of April 28, the number of confirmed cases in South Carolina was 6,095 and the number of deaths, 244.

The numbers continue to climb.



“This pandemic is unique in that every single county is affected by the emergency,” said Kim Stenson, Director of the S.C. Emergency Management Division (SCEMD). “When hurricanes threaten the coast or when severe weather impacts the Upstate, mutual aid agreements allow the South Carolina Emergency Management Division and unaffected counties to move and redistribute resources and supplies.

“This time,” he added, “we are



## CORONAVIRUS COVID-19

very much reliant on supply contracts for resources and staffing. But with this being a global issue, many of the items we need are scarce.”

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— Kim Stenson  
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According to Stenson, a shortage of supplies appears to be one of the most significant challenges facing South Carolina and other governments worldwide.

South Carolina requested its full allocation of medical equipment from the Strategic National Stockpile allowing the

S.C. National Guard to distribute multiple shipments of N-95 masks, face shields, surgical masks, gowns and gloves to all 46 counties.

“We’ve received more than 2,400 requests for resources, which is a record, and have submitted orders

to have those requests fulfilled,” Stenson said. “Yet, we’re being told by many vendors that they don’t know when their stocks are going to be replenished so we can get what we need. We are seeing some resupply, but many items remain scarce.”

The SCEMD is approaching the coronavirus pandemic similar to the way it has prepared for and responded to previous disasters. The agency is using the state’s existing emergency plans and systems to coordinate resources.

However, the agency is operating differently.

Stenson said the SCEMD is remaining flexible, adapting, and adjusting its response and operating procedures whenever necessary because the coronavirus pandemic is different in three major ways:

- The pandemic is a statewide disaster of long duration that could last weeks or perhaps months. The state has faced statewide disasters before, but most of them were of short duration.
- Second, the pandemic is causing economic damage that is significant-

ly affecting people and businesses. Previous disasters have damaged and destroyed infrastructure, homes and businesses.

- Third, the pandemic is forcing everyone to work differently. For safety, the state's emergency response team is working much more "virtually," using applications that allow its members to work anywhere from computers and laptops. Only about a dozen staff members, standing at least six feet apart, are working in the State Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Many others are teleworking. For previous disasters, the State EOC has been fully-staffed with about 200 staff members.

This month (April) is expected to be the worst month for the pandemic's spread, and COVID-19 deaths. But again, no one really knows what the future holds.

"Patience is key. This virus isn't going away anytime soon," Stenson warned. "We could be dealing with this for months, not just days or weeks. Meanwhile, all South Carolinians must do all they can to avoid being infected or transmitting the virus to others."

He encouraged everyone to:

- Stay at home as much as possible and minimize in-person contact with others outside their households, and
- Monitor themselves for symptoms, practice social distancing, avoid touching their face and frequently-touched items, and regularly wash their hands.

South Carolina has received a Federal Declaration for COVID-19. Therefore, the Public Assistance Program of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will help reimburse local governments and state agencies for costs associated with emergency, life-

safety actions when responding to the dangerous respiratory disease. Eligible for reimbursement includes the cost of operating EOCs, constructing temporary medical facilities and paying employees overtime.

"Most county emergency managers are very familiar with FEMA's Public Assistance Program and the process, and that process is just beginning," Stenson said. "Further, other federal programs will become available to reimburse costs that might not be eligible for reimbursement by the FEMA Public Assistance Program."

State and local leaders, and emergency managers have learned lessons in past disasters that have helped better prepare them for those in the future. Still, the coronavirus pandemic is teaching everyone new lessons.

"This pandemic has been unique for all of us, especially emergency managers who plan, train, exercise and prepare for disasters, and we're experiencing things we never have before in many respects," Stenson said. "While we must all remember our training and trust our plans, flexibility will be the key to the best outcome. We must remain as flexible as possible so we can adapt our response to what the virus has yet to do, which will be challenging."

Stenson reminded local au-

thorities that SCEMD's mission is to assist counties in their response and recovery efforts.

"We have been successful in supporting counties in several federally-declared disasters in the last seven years, and we will continue to do so during this one," he said.

For more information and updates on the coronavirus pandemic, county officials are encouraged to visit SCEMD's website at [scemd.org/](http://scemd.org/). They are also encouraged to visit websites of state emergency response team partners:

The FEMA rumor control page at:

[fema.gov/coronavirus-rumor-control](http://fema.gov/coronavirus-rumor-control)

S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control at:

[scdhec.gov/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19](http://scdhec.gov/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19)



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