

Governor issues stay-at-home order to Minnesotans

Wednesday, March 25: To slow the spread of COVID-19 across the state, Gov. Tim Walz signed Executive Order 20-20 directing Minnesotans to stay at home and limit movements outside of their home beyond essential needs. This order takes effect at 11:59 p.m. on Friday, March 27, and will end at 5 p.m. on Friday, April 10.

“We must take bold action to save the lives of Minnesotans,” said Walz. “Having served as a command sergeant major in the Army National Guard, I know the importance of having a plan. While the virus will still be here when this order ends, this action will slow the spread of COVID-19 and give Minnesota time to ready for battle.”

Modeling released today by the Minnesota Department of Health and the University of Minnesota predicts that more than 70,000 Minnesotans could die from COVID-19 without action. The governor’s two-week order to stay home is forecasted to significantly slow the spread of COVID-19 and allow the state time to make key preparations for the pandemic. These preparations include building hospital capacity, increasing access to life-saving equipment like ventilators, increasing testing, planning for how to care for vulnerable populations, and assessing public health data to determine which community mitigation strategies are most effective.

“We will work with our world-renowned health care sector, cutting-edge manufacturers, innovative business community, and strong-spirited Minnesotans across the state to tackle this virus head on,” Walz continued. “These are trying times. But we are Minnesotans. We see challenges – and we tackle them. No matter how daunting the challenge; no matter how dark the times; Minnesota has always risen up – by coming together. If we unite as One Minnesota, we will save lives.”

During this two-week period, Minnesotans may leave their residences only to perform any of the following activities, and while doing so, they should practice social distancing:

- Health and safety activities, such as obtaining emergency services or medical supplies;
- Outdoor activities, such as walking, hiking, running, biking, hunting, or fishing;
- Necessary supplies and services, such as getting groceries, gasoline, or carry-out;
- Essential and interstate travel, such as returning to a home from outside this state;
- Care of others, such as caring for a family member, friend, or pet in another household;
- Displacement, such as moving between emergency shelters if you are without a home;

- Relocation to ensure safety, such as relocating to a different location if your home has been unsafe due to domestic violence, sanitation, or essential operations reasons;

- Tribal activities and lands, such as activities by members within the boundaries of their tribal reservation

“Our top priority is the health and safety of Minnesotans,” said Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. “As the mom of a first grader and the daughter of a parent with underlying health conditions, I know that the coming weeks will be difficult for many Minnesota families, but social distancing is the most important action we can take as a community to limit the spread of COVID-19 and care for each other.”

“Public health and health care workers around the state are working incredibly hard to protect Minnesotans from this outbreak, and we need all Minnesotans to do their part to slow the spread,” said Minnesota Department of Health commissioner Jan Malcolm. “These new measures will buy us much-needed time to secure additional resources and line up additional protections for our most vulnerable Minnesotans.”

Workers who work in critical sectors during this time are exempt from the stay-at-home order. These exemptions are based on federal guidance from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security with some Minnesota-specific additions. This includes, but is not limited to, jobs in:

- Healthcare and public health;
- Law enforcement, public safety, and first responders;
- Emergency shelters, congregate living facilities, and drop-in centers;
- Child care;
- Food and agriculture;
- News media;
- Energy;
- Water and wastewater; and
- Critical manufacturing.

Also on Wednesday, March 25, the governor issued executive orders extending the closure of bars, restaurants, and other public accommodations until Friday, May 1, at 5 p.m. and authorizing the commissioner of education to implement a “distance learning period” for Minnesota’s students beginning on Monday, March 30, through Monday, May 4.

The governor’s executive orders will have the full force and effect of law upon approval by the executive council.

Updates on the COVID-19 pandemic in Minnesota are available at mn.gov/governor/covid-19/. Frequently asked questions are available at mn.gov/governor/covid-19/faq.jsp.

First Minnesotan dies as the result of COVID-19

Saturday, March 21: The Minnesota Department of Health reported the first confirmed death of a Minnesota resident due to COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. The death occurred on Thursday, March 19, in a Ramsey County resident in their 80s who recently tested positive for COVID-19 and was the contact of an earlier confirmed case.

“Gwen and I extend our deepest sympathies to the loved ones during this time of loss,” said Gov. Tim Walz. “As COVID-19 continues to spread in Minnesota, we must all do what we can to keep each other safe.”

Minnesota health commissioner Jan Malcolm said the death underscores the importance of protecting our most vulnerable Minnesotans during the outbreak. “Our condolences go out to the family and friends of the patient,” Malcolm said. “We’ve all seen reports of outbreak-related deaths in other states and countries, but this Minnesota death reminds us how important it is to continue working to protect each other during this outbreak.” Malcolm emphasized the importance of all Minnesotans doing their part to slow the spread of the virus and protect those in our communities who might be at higher risk of severe illness or death. The most vulnerable include those over 65 and those with underlying health conditions.

Steps that everyone can take to slow the spread of the virus:

- Cover your coughs and sneezes with your elbow or sleeve, or a tissue and then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands afterwards.
- Washing your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom or before eating. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-percent alcohol.
- Avoid touching your face – especially your eyes, nose and mouth – with unwashed hands.
- Stay home if you have cold- or flu-like symptoms, for seven days after your illness onset or three days after your fever resolves without fever reducing medicine, and avoid close contact with people who are sick.

State and local public health have implemented a series of community interventions such as temporary closures of restaurants, bars, and schools, recommended social distancing measures such as staying home as much as possible, maintaining a distance of six feet from other people, replacing in-person work meetings with teleworking, and cancelling gatherings of 50 people or more. Also, do not hold events with more than 10 people where the majority of participants are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Diocese of New Ulm extends mass suspension to April 13

Wednesday, March 25: Bishop John LeVoir announced on Wednesday, March 25, that “based on the most recent information received by local, state, and federal health authorities for slowing the rapid spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), I have made the difficult decision to extend the suspension of all public masses in the Diocese of New Ulm through April 13, 2020.”

Easter this year is Sunday, April 12, meaning this suspension until Monday, April 13, will cover Holy Week. “All Catholics in the diocese remain dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass during this time,” added LeVoir.

Meeker County Jail closes lobby; jail visitation still happening

Tuesday, March 24: Effective immediately, the lobby areas of the Meeker County Law Enforcement Center and the Meeker County Jail are by appointment only. “We will continue to process gun permits and civil process,” said Meeker County Sheriff Brian Cruze. “Please call 320-693-5414 to set an appointment for these services. For all law enforcement related questions or issues, please call 320-693-5400. For all jail related business, please call 320-693-5415.”

The Meeker County Jail will continue with visitation for inmates on Thursdays from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. and from 7 to 9 p.m. along with Sundays 12:30 to 4:30 pm. The lobby area will be open during these times for visitors; however, CDC and Department of Health recommendations must be followed. Anyone who is or has been sick is discouraged from coming to the jail for visitation. Phone visitation still remains available to all Meeker County inmates.

Cruze remains committed to public safety and assures the public all calls for services will be handled accordingly. Deputies may utilize phone contact, where applicable, to handle some calls in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. There is no change for emergency or medical calls. All emergencies will generate a response by law enforcement, and all medicals will be dispatched to the appropriate EMS personnel.