

EV-W Schools extends lunch distribution from 10 to 12 noon

Wednesday, March 18: The Eden Valley-Watkins School District is delivering meals for students at four sites:

- Door #12, EV-W High School, Eden Valley;
- Door #1, Watkins Elementary, Watkins;
- The Church of Our Lady, Manannah;
- St. Nicholas Catholic Church, St. Nicholas.

Pick-up hours have been extended from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. The district will start meal deliveries on Monday, March 23. There is a survey on the district web to sign up – at www.evwk12.mn.us under the “Coronavirus (COVID-19)” tab or contact Jessica Heying in food service at jheying@evwk12.mn.us.

New Ulm bishop suspends masses through March

Wednesday, March 18: Bishop John M. LeVoi of the Diocese of New Ulm has suspended all public masses until the end of March. The Diocese of New Ulm includes the Church of Our Lady in Manannah. “I am concerned that all people be safe during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said LeVoi. “Consequently, due to the public health recommendations from President Trump’s newly issued guideline that over the next 15 days, Americans should not gather in groups of more than ten people, I am immediately suspending all public masses in the Diocese of New Ulm from Wednesday, March 18, until at least-Tuesday, March 31. All Catholics in the diocese are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass during this time. The fundamental operating principles of the Diocese of New Ulm as we face this pandemic are prevention or the slowing down of the spreading of the virus, as well as the spiritual well-being of our parishioners, while not endangering oneself.”

In addition, Bishop John M. LeVoi ordered:

- Effective today (March 18), all gatherings of ten people or more should be canceled or postponed until at least March 31. Consider live streaming of meetings.
- All funerals are to be private and not public; that is, for the immediate family only.
- The celebration of infant baptisms should also follow the ten-person limit.
- I ask that church buildings be open during the day, especially on the weekends, so that people can pray in church.
- I ask that clergy be available to parishioners for communion (especially for sick/homebound), for confession, and blessings.

MDH issues updated guidance on COVID-19 testing criteria

Tuesday, March 17: The Minnesota Department of Health announced that, due to a national shortage of COVID-19 laboratory testing materials, the state is forced to make adjustments to its testing criteria to focus on the highest priority specimens, including hospitalized patients. Health care workers and those in congregate living settings such as long-term care will also be given high priority.

The Minnesota Department of Health sent a message to Minnesota health care providers on Tuesday, March 17, with the following guidance:

- Hospitals and health care systems should assess whether they can send specimens to a commercial reference laboratory, and determine their own priorities for testing and assess whether these labs have restrictions.
- Limit sending specimens to the Minnesota Department of Health to those from hospitalized COVID-19 patients. At this time, MDH can also test ill health care workers and ill persons living in congregate settings.
- Providers should inform all patients with undiagnosed fever and/or acute respiratory symptoms (cough, shortness of breath), even those not able to be tested, that they should self-quarantine for 7 days after illness onset, or 72 hours after resolution of fever (without taking fever-reducing medications), and improvement of respiratory symptoms, whichever is longer. Patients should seek care if their symptoms become severe. They should call ahead to health provider when possible.
- Patients with symptoms who are not able to be tested should isolate themselves from household and intimate contacts as much as possible. Household and intimate contacts of these individuals should limit their activities in public for 14 days and monitor for symptoms.

People who have a suspected or known case of COVID-19, but who are not severely ill, should stay home while they recover. If they have severe underlying health conditions or are older adults, they should contact their health care provider to see if they have additional recommendations for them. If someone develops severe symptoms they should call ahead to their health care provider if possible prior to seeking care.

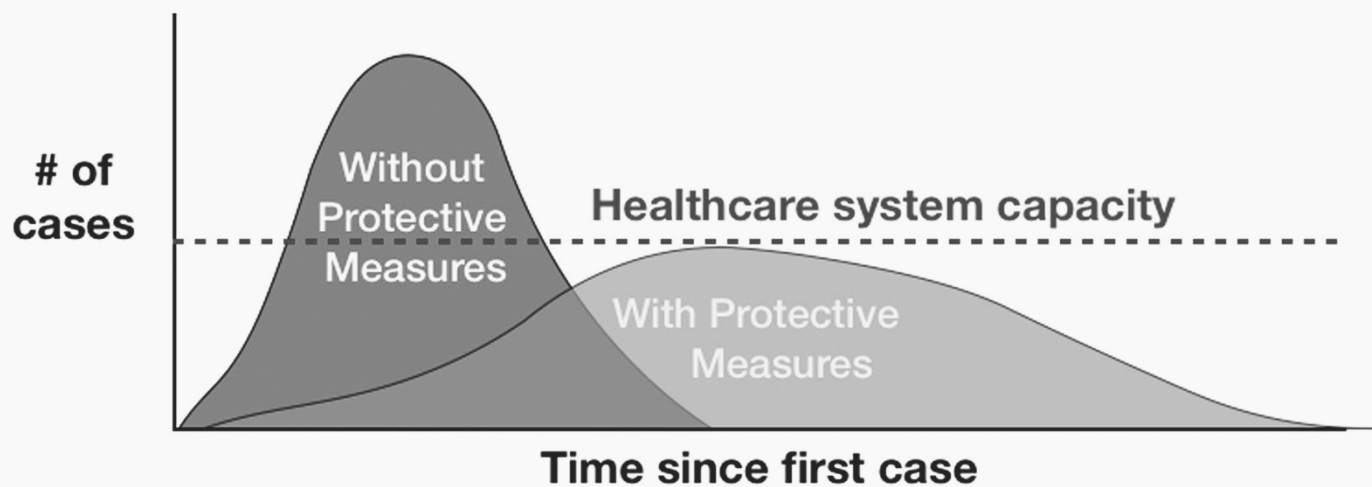
Gov. Tim Walz sent a letter to vice president Mike Pence last week calling for an immediate increase in the number of COVID-19 laboratory tests available to Minnesota.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spread primarily by respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza spreads. It can also spread when people touch contaminated surfaces and then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.

The Minnesota Department of Health has set up a COVID-19 hotline open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily at 651-201-3920.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety has a hotline to field questions about issues associated with community mitigation, including school and business impacts. That line is also open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily at 1-800-657-3504 (toll-free).

COVID-19



Adapted from CDC / The Economist

DEED creating Emergency Loan Program for small businesses

Monday, March 23: The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) is creating an emergency loan program to help Minnesota small business owners who need immediate assistance to meet their families’ basic needs during COVID-19 closures.

The loan program was created under the Small Business Assistance Executive Order 20-15 announced by Gov. Tim Walz on Monday, March 23. The loan program is intended to help businesses, temporarily closed under Executive Order 20-04, later clarified by Executive Order 20-08, which stopped on-site customer dining at restaurants and bars and closed an extensive list of other small businesses whose owners may not have adequate cash flow to withstand temporary closure.

“Over the last week, we’ve heard from many of Minnesota’s small businesses who are facing significant hardships because of the COVID-19 crisis,” said Walz. “Small businesses are the backbone of our communities, and now, more than ever, we’re looking to creative solutions like DEED’s emergency loan program to help them weather these extraordinarily difficult times.”

“We know that this emergency loan program is just one tool businesses will need to leverage to stay afloat,” said DEED commissioner Steve Grove. “It’s an important one because it will get cash flowing quickly to the small Minnesota businesses that need it most.”

Executive Order 20-15 directs DEED to create a Small Business Emergency Loan Program by making available \$30 million from special revenue funds. These dollars will be used by DEED’s lender network to make loans of between \$2,500 and \$35,000 for qualifying small businesses. The loans will be 50-percent forgivable, and offered at a 0-percent interest rate. If other financing becomes available to small businesses that received an emergency loan, such as federal funding, the emergency loan must be repaid. These emergency loans will be made by an existing network of lenders DEED works with across the state. Depending on the size of the loans offered to businesses, DEED estimates this emergency loan program will provide needed resources to between 1,200 and 5,000 businesses.

DEED expects loan applications will available later this week through its lender network. Minnesota small businesses should send questions about this emergency loan program to elp@state.mn.us.

The executive order also allows local units of government or lending partners which have a revolving loan fund to use those funds to issue loans to retail and service providers for the next 90 days. DEED estimates that up to \$28 million in capital could be accessible through local revolving loan funds and local governments through this action.

DEED is the state’s principal economic development agency, promoting business recruitment, expansion and retention, workforce development, international trade, and community development. For the latest information from DEED for employers and businesses and workers, visit the DEED’s COVID-19 information page at <https://mn.gov/deed/newscenter/covid/>.

Salons, barber shops, and tanning parlors added to closure list

Tuesday, March 17: Gov. Tim Walz clarified the types of businesses and places of public accommodation subject to closure per Executive Order 20-04. The executive order clarifies that the closure order applies to salons, barbershops, and other similar establishments. “As we move quickly to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are constantly learning and adjusting to feedback from health experts, business owners, and workers,” said Walz. “The best way to slow the spread of COVID-19 is to implement social distancing, and this executive order provides clarification on how we can better practice these community mitigation strategies.”

Executive Order 20-04, ordering the temporary closures, is amended by the following additions (indicated by underlined text): “Gymnasiums, fitness centers, recreation centers, indoor sports facilities, indoor exercise facilities, exercise studios, tanning establishments, body art establishments, tattoo parlors, piercing parlors, businesses offering massage therapy or similar body work, spas, salons, nail salons, cosmetology salons, esthetician salons, advanced practice esthetician salons, eyelash salons, and barber shops.”

Stearns County shutting doors; doing business by mail, online

Thursday, March 19: The Stearns County Board of Commissioners took action today to issue a local emergency declaration. This act allows for Stearns County to change business practices that not only protects the county’s employees but also safeguards the public. The declaration allows all county departments to determine how to continue providing services while maintaining social distancing in compliance with the governor’s executive orders and guidelines of the Minnesota Department of Health.

Many of the services the county provides are currently available either through the mail, via phone, or online. Drop boxes are being placed in the entrances of the county administration center in downtown St. Cloud and the service center building in Waite Park for residents to drop off paperwork for processing. Stearns County is also working to identify processes for how face-to-face services can be provided when that interaction is required.

Stearns County, in collaboration with Benton County, continues the hotline number, 320-650-6625 or 1-877-782-5683, during the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. This has been established for the purposes of answering the public’s questions. Individuals can also call the Minnesota Department of Health hotline, which is staffed 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week, at 651-201-3920 or 1-800-657-3903.

Stearns County Public Health is also asking every Stearns County resident to do their part to help fight the spread of COVID-19. “We are living through an event we’ve not had to deal with in recent memory,” said Renee Frauendienst, Stearns County Public Health division director. “The good news is, our ancestors have, and their experience and learning are guiding our response.”

Stearns County is keeping their website, www.stearnscountymn.gov, updated with guidelines, resources, and other info. Minnesota currently has 77 confirmed cases, with three of them in Stearns County.

Gov. Walz orders postponement of elective surgeries, procedures

Wednesday, March 18: Gov. Tim Walz signed Executive Order 20-09, ordering health care providers to postpone elective surgeries and procedures, including non-emergency elective dental procedures, to focus health care capacity and equipment on responding to COVID-19 cases and other emergencies.

This order complies with guidance issued on Tuesday, March 17, from the Centers on Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as similar guidance from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services issued on Wednesday, March 18, to delay elective surgeries and procedures, both to conserve health care resources and to reduce contact between patients and providers. “The greatest risk we face during the COVID-19 pandemic is overwhelming our health care systems and limiting their ability to respond to emerging cases,” said Walz. “This executive order keeps more health care resources open and prioritizes life-saving intervention for COVID-19 patients and other emergency care.”

Elective surgeries and procedure must be postponed indefinitely beginning at 5 pm on Monday, March 23. The executive order clarifies that a non-essential surgery or procedure is defined as a surgery or procedure that can be delayed without undue risk to the current or future health of a patient. Surgeries and procedures that prevent loss of life, permanent dysfunction of an organ or extremity, or risk of metastasis or progression of staging for non-COVID-19 patients should not be postponed under this order.

CentraCare rescheduling appointments, elective surgeries

Tuesday, March 17: Due to the presence of COVID-19, CentraCare Health will be canceling and rescheduling patients who have elective procedures, surgeries, physicals, and/or well exams. This action is being taken to provide safe care for patients, reduce the speed of COVID-19 spread, conserve necessary supplies, and redistribute CentraCare staff and providers as needed throughout this pandemic.

Starting Wednesday, March 18, CentraCare will screen patients at the front door before they enter clinic locations. After entering, patients must practice social distancing, keeping a distance of at least 6 feet from others, if possible.

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