Gov. Wolf, Sec. of Health, PA Chamber Outline COVID-19 Mitigation Guidance for Pennsylvania Schools, Businesses, and Additional Closures in Delaware County

March 13, 2020

Education, Press Release, Public Health

PA Total Cases Now 41

Governor Tom Wolf, Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine, Secretary of Education Pedro Rivera, and Pennsylvania Chamber President Gene Barr this afternoon provided an update on the state's COVID-19 mitigation efforts, including guidance as Gov. Wolf earlier this afternoon ordered a two-week closure of all Pennsylvania schools beginning Monday, March 16. Schools to be closed include K-12 public and charter brick-and-mortar schools, with cyber charter school closures considered on a case-by-case basis and private schools encouraged to consider closures.

The total number of positive cases in Pennsylvania as of 4:30 p.m. includes eight new cases: two adults and one child in Cumberland County, one adult in Montgomery County, one adult in Washington County, two adults in Delaware County, and one adult in Bucks County, bringing the state's total to 41, with six of those cases confirmed by the CDC. During the press conference, Sec. Levine corrected one case previously attributed to Delaware County, which should be in Chester County, its first case.

"Yesterday I announced the start of significant social distancing in Montgomery County and starting tomorrow, we will expand these mitigation efforts to Delaware County," Gov. Wolf said. "We also will be closing all schools statewide for two weeks starting Monday.

"Where there is evidence of exposure to COVID-19, the commonwealth has taken decisive action – closing both public and private schools and early learning centers, prohibiting visitors from entering senior care and long-term care facilities, and closing government offices. We have initiated these actions in places where we have confirmed evidence of risk, like Montgomery and Delaware counties, and we will continue to monitor this situation as it unfolds to determine if and when we will do this in other counties in Pennsylvania."

Pennsylvania Chamber of Commerce President Gene Barr offered guidance for businesses.

"I have been working with the U.S. Chamber and local chambers of commerce to provide advice to our members and I want them to know that it's time to be flexible," Barr said. "Businesses' most important assets are their customers and their employees, and they need to be flexible to be sure they are protecting them."

Pennsylvania Department of Education Sec. Pedro Rivera offered comments to parents and school administrators regarding the closure of all Pennsylvania schools for two weeks.

"We know Pennsylvania is a diverse state," Sec. Rivera said. "By announcing that all schools are closed, Governor Wolf has ensured school leaders have the opportunity to make important decisions for their communities. This includes the ability to identify essential staff, and ensure continuity of education plans, continuity of operations, and most importantly coordinate access for kids to have meals while their schools are closed."

Guidance for Montgomery, Delaware County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Applicability

- The following guidance was in place beginning today in Montgomery County and will be in place tomorrow, March 14, in Delaware County for fourteen days.
- We will evaluate our options throughout that period and continue to communicate as we learn more.

Montgomery and Delaware Counties

- A no visitor policy has been implemented for correctional facilities and nursing homes and will be evaluated for other facilities.
- Freedom of travel will remain, but the governor and his administration ask all people to refrain from non-essential travel.
- All child care centers licensed by the Commonwealth will be closed beginning Monday, March 16.
- Adult day care centers will be closed beginning Monday, March 16.
- Essential services will be available: police, fire and emergency medical services, and essential services for vulnerable populations.
- Supermarkets, pharmacies, and gas stations will remain open. The governor and his administration recommend that non-essential retail facilities close, and ask that business owners for non-essential services consider the well-being of their customers, staff and community when making a decision to close or remain open.

Commonwealth Employees

- The Office of Administration provided a message to all Commonwealth employees regarding those who work or live in Montgomery County. This same guidance will be sent to employees who live and work in Delaware County.
- This includes individuals who live in Montgomery or Delaware counties and work in other counties and those who live in other counties and work in Montgomery or Delaware counties.
- Individuals will be instructed to work from home.
- The Commonwealth is authorizing a 10 workday paid absence for individuals who don’t have telework capabilities.
- Facilities that are in Montgomery County that are Commonwealth facilities and provide essential services will remain open.
- Facilities that are administered by Montgomery or Delaware County will follow the same procedures as those counties.

Statewide

- The Wolf Administration strongly encourages the suspension of large gatherings, events, conferences of 250 individuals or more.
- The Wolf Administration discourages individuals from traveling to recreational activities like gyms, movie theaters and shopping malls.
- The Wolf Administration encourages religious leaders to exercise discretion in order to mitigate the spread of illness.
- Initiated a no-visitor policy at all State correctional facilities and nursing homes to ensure the safety of inmates, residents, staff and visitors.
- Restricted visitors in state centers effective today to ensure health and safety for individuals with an intellectual disability.
- Restricted visitors in assisted living and personal care homes to minimize exposure to our seniors and individuals with disabilities.

COVID-19 Case Information Update

The Department of Health stressed the role Pennsylvanians play in helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cover any coughs or sneezes with your elbow, not your hands.
- Clean surfaces frequently.

- If you are sick, stay home until you are feeling better.

Quotes from Governor Tom Wolf and Secretary Rachel Levine

“Pennsylvania has taken a different approach than most other states and countries,” Gov. Wolf said. “We’re trying to approach the coronavirus outbreak in a measured way. Where there is evidence of exposure to COVID-19, the commonwealth has taken decisive action. Closing schools and early learning centers – both public and private, prohibiting visitors from entering senior care and long-term care facilities, and closing government offices. We will continue to monitor this situation as it unfolds to determine if – and when – we will do this in other counties in Pennsylvania.”

“I want to personally thank everyone for doing their part in helping contain COVID-19,” Gov. Wolf said. “That includes the business owners who have shifted their operations to offer no-contact points of sale, work-from home options, or other changes to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Thank you to everyone for doing your part.”

“I strongly encourage the statewide suspension of large gatherings, events, conferences of 250 individuals or more and discourage people from traveling to recreational activities such as gyms, movie theaters and shopping malls,” Gov. Wolf said. “And while people are free to travel, I ask that everyone refrain from non-essential travel. We all need to do our part to help stop the spread of the coronavirus. The time to do this is now. We cannot wait.”

“Essential services – police, fire, and emergency medical services, public transportation, essential services for vulnerable populations such as our facilities for people with intellectual disabilities and autism – will still be operational,” Gov. Wolf said. “Supermarkets, pharmacies, and gas stations will remain open, but we do recommend that non-essential retail facilities close.”

“This situation is quickly evolving, even for us here at the Department of Health,” Dr. Levine said. “It can be overwhelming and scary to hear that you should stay home. Aside from practicing good health habits, we want you to practice good self-care to ensure your body is getting the proper nutrients from fruits, vegetables and getting enough sleep.”

“As this situation evolves, we will continually update Pennsylvanians through our website, health.pa.gov, our Facebook page and our Twitter account,” Dr. Levine said. “It’s important to remember that the most accurate and timely information regarding this outbreak is available through the Department of Health.”

Updated Coronavirus Links: Press Releases, State Lab Photos, Graphics

- For the daily COVID-19 Report, visit here.
- For all press releases regarding coronavirus, please visit here.
- Find the latest information on the coronavirus here.
- Photos of the state’s lab in Exton are available for download and use here.
- Coronavirus and preparedness graphics are available here near the bottom of the page: On.pa.gov/coronavirus

RELATED NEWS

Governor Wolf Announces Closure Of Pennsylvania Schools

Gov. Wolf, Sec. Of Health Outline COVID-19 Mitigation Guidance For Montgomery County, Commonwealth Of Pennsylvania