COVID UPDATE: Gov. Justice announces State employee travel ban, basketball tournament cancellation among latest precautionary coronavirus measures

3/12/2020

CHARLESTON, WV – Gov. Jim Justice joined State health officials and emergency response leaders at the Capitol Complex in Charleston today, holding a press conference to update West Virginians on several precautionary measures that are being taken in the interest of protecting the public from the potential spread of novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Visit Coronavirus.wv.gov for current COVID-19 alerts and updates (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx)

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There are currently no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in West Virginia. As of March 12, 2020, West Virginia has tested 12 residents for COVID-19, with nine results coming back negative and three pending.

“Even though we still don’t have a confirmed case at this time, in talking to our great medical professionals, we know that, eventually, that will no longer be the case,” Gov. Justice said. “So we’re continuing to do everything in our power to be prepared but we also have to be proactive to make sure all West Virginians are as safe as possible.”

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During the event, the Governor announced that he has issued a State employee travel ban on both out-of-state and international travel for State business. He also asked all West Virginians to reconsider non-essential out-of-state travel for personal business.

Additionally, Gov. Justice directed all State government offices to avoid holding any large meetings or gatherings.

The Governor went on to announce he has directed State Purchasing Director Mike Sheets to authorize all emergency exemptions so that agencies can acquire any supplies they may need to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of West Virginia.

Gov. Justice recommended that all West Virginians who are at the highest risk of having complications related to COVID – including seniors and those with chronic health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease – avoid large crowds.

The Governor announced he is asking all nursing homes to restrict visitors with exceptions for end-of-life or serious illness situations.

Finally, the Governor announced that he has asked WVSSAC Director Bernie Dolan to suspend both the boys and girls West Virginia High School State Basketball Tournaments.

“I hate that we’re at the point where we have to make some of these decisions,” Gov. Justice said. “When you look at the state basketball tournament, I of all people know how much hard work the kids and their parents put in. The team I coach is in the state tournament. I truly know the hours of practices that these kids put in, for months and months, and how disappointed they and their families will be, along with the kids at the other schools. And again, this is all being done out of an abundance of caution, but we have to think of the long-term health and safety of all of our people first and foremost.

“With that, I would tell you that we should still continue to live our lives as best we can, but we need to be smart.”

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Gov. Justice was joined at the press conference by Bill Crouch, Secretary for the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources; Dr. Cathy Slemp, West Virginia State Health Officer and Commissioner of the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health; and Major General James Hoyer, Adjutant General of the West Virginia National Guard.

State health officials are reminding the public that good hygiene practices are key to containing the spread of any disease, with handwashing being of paramount importance.

For more information about COVID-19 prevention and more, you can call the State's toll-free hotline at **1-800-887-4304** or visit

Coronavirus.wv.gov (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx).

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