Press Releases

Public Schools to Transition to Distance Learning for Two Weeks, Governor Announces New Directives Regarding Telehealth and Utility Services

Governor Gina M. Raimondo and Director of Health Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH today made several important announcements about the state's response to the COVID-19 public health crisis.

- Schools: The next two weeks - from Monday, March 23rd through Friday April 3 - will be distance learning weeks for all public schools in Rhode Island. During this time, school buildings will be closed to students, but school will be taking place remotely in homes across the state. After two weeks, the Governor and Dr. Alexander-Scott will reevaluate the situation and make a new determination.

- Telehealth: Today the Governor signed an executive order directing health insurers to follow previously announced instructions to cover visits conducted over the phone and online during this crisis. This order for an expansion of Telemedicine coverage will apply to primary and specialty care, as well as mental and behavioral health care.

- Utilities: The PUC has issued an emergency order mandating that all regulated utilities not terminate services at this time. The state has also directed utilities to stop sending past due accounts to collection agencies and is encouraging non-regulated utilities to do the same. If service is terminated, Rhode Islanders should call their utility provider. If the provider is unable to help, customers should call the Division of Public Utilities and Carriers at 401-780-9700.

Dr. Alexander-Scott announced today that Rhode Island has ten additional cases of COVID-19. These people range in age from their 20s to their 70s. RIDOH is investigating their illness sources. This brings Rhode Island's case count to 33.

counselors, pharmacists, and many other health professions. This temporary license can be renewed one time. There will be no cost to obtain the license or for the one-time renewal. RIDOH is also extending the expiration dates for any of these professionals whose license is set to expire in the next 90 days.

Data updates

Number of Rhode Island COVID-19 positive (including presumptive positive) cases: 33

Number of people who had negative test results at RIDOH's State Health Laboratories: 540

Number of people for whom tests are pending: 334

Number of people who are currently instructed to self-quarantine in Rhode Island: approximately 2,500

Key messages for the public

If you have traveled anywhere internationally in the last 14 days, self-quarantine for 14 days. That means do not go to work or school and stay at home.

Avoid all crowded places, large events, and mass gatherings. This is social distancing. However, people should continue doing essential errands (such as going to the grocery store).

Through March 30th, there will be no on-site food consumption for restaurants, bars, coffee shops, or other food establishments in Rhode Island. (Establishments with a food license can continue to conduct pick-up, drive-thru and delivery only.)

Due to the closure of schools, free "Grab and Go" meals are available (March 16th - March 20th) for children throughout Rhode Island. More information is available online.

Whenever possible, avoid close personal contact with people in public. When greeting people avoid handshakes and hugs. Additional guidance is available from CDC.

Although Rhode Island has the testing capacity it needs, people without symptoms should not be tested for COVID-19. Testing individuals with no symptoms is not recommended by CDC.

People who think they have COVID-19 should call their healthcare provider. These people should not go directly to a healthcare facility without first calling a healthcare provider (unless they are experiencing a medical emergency). Healthcare providers have a dedicated number that they are then using to consult with RIDOH on potential COVID-19 cases.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

When greeting people avoid handshakes and hugs.

Be sure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms. Most people will be able to recover from COVID-19 at home.

Pay attention for potential COVID-19 symptoms including, fever, cough, and shortness of breath. If you feel like you are developing symptoms, call your doctor.

More information is available from CDC.

People with general, non-medical questions about COVID-19 can visit www.health.ri.gov/covid, write to RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov, or call 401-222-8022. This is the COVID-19 Hotline that RIDOH has available to the public. The Hotline will be staffed this weekend from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm both Saturday and Sunday. (After hours people are being directed to call 211.)

Everyone can help stop the spread of viruses in Rhode Island.

Get your flu shot, and make sure the people around you do the same.

Wash your hands often throughout the day. Use warm water and soap. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

Cough or sneeze into your elbow. Viruses can spread by coughing or sneezing on other people or into your hands.

Stay home from work or school if you are sick.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.

Related links

Department or agency: Department of Health
Online: http://www.health.ri.gov (http://www.health.ri.gov)
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