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Gov. Beshear Recommends Schools Stay Closed until May 1 in COVID-19 Fight

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Governor also announces commutations, planned release of some non-violent prisoners

FRANKFORT, Ky. (April 2, 2020) – Gov. Andy Beshear recommended Thursday that school districts statewide extend the suspension of in-person instruction until at least May 1 in the latest intensification of efforts to fight the spread of the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

The Governor spoke earlier in the day with school superintendents from across the commonwealth about the need to keep the restrictions in place as positive cases of the disease surge. He said he expects private schools to follow the guidance as well.

“I have encouraged all of our school districts to extend that nontraditional instruction, making sure that our kids out there have learning activities and meal service,” Gov. Beshear said. “This is further sacrifice by our kids and by our educators, but it’s absolutely necessary.”

He said officials are watching data coming in from across the state and nation and studying how other cities are dealing with the surge of cases. The Governor said a decision to further extend the restrictions, perhaps even canceling the rest of the school year for in-person instruction, was possible.

“There is a real chance that we don’t go back to in-person instruction this year, but we’re not there yet,” Gov. Beshear said.

Sentences commuted for non-violent offenders
Honoring his commitment to safeguard the health and safety of all Kentuckians, including corrections staff and those in custody, Gov. Beshear announced Thursday plans to commute the sentences

(https://governor.ky.gov/attachments/20200402_Executive-Order_2020-267_Conditional-Commutation-of-Sentence.pdf) for hundreds of non-violent offenders. The move reduces the risk of virus transmission for an at-risk population as well as for Department of Corrections officers and other personnel.

“This is lightening the load on our corrections system and at the same time protecting some of the most vulnerable individuals who are in the corrections system,” said J. Michael Brown, Secretary of the Executive Cabinet.

Gov. Beshear commuted the sentences of 186 inmates identified as being medically vulnerable to the coronavirus, and plans to commute the sentences of another 743 inmates in state custody who are due to complete their sentences within the next six months.

The Governor said all of those receiving commutations were being held for non-violent, non-sexual offenses.

State Parks

Gov. Beshear announced that, beginning Friday, all Kentucky State Parks no longer will be open for overnight stays. The facilities will be open for use during daytime hours as long as visitors maintain proper social distancing. Kentucky State Parks will be open to the public between the hours of 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.

“Starting tomorrow there will be no overnight stays in our state parks. None in the campgrounds and none in the lodges,” said Gov. Beshear. “This is to make sure that we’re all healthy at home. It’s making sure that we’re not creating opportunities for people to create a crowd and we’re not presenting a haven for those coming from other places to potentially bring their contacts.”

Fairgrounds

The Governor said plans are moving ahead to convert the state fairgrounds in Louisville into a 2,000-bed makeshift hospital.

“Our goal is to be ready when the surge comes,” Gov. Beshear said. “I want to have it ready before we need even one of those single beds. And if we don’t end up needing it: Hallelujah!”

Call to action on gloves

Gov. Beshear issued a call to action as the state works to keep stocks of personal protective equipment (PPE) amid dwindling supplies.

“What we need right now in Kentucky, and I know there’s a lot out there, is gloves for our medical professionals,” he said. “We believe this is the next area where there’s going to be another big run in the United States.”

The Governor asked anyone who could make donations of gloves or other PPE supplies to call the National Guard Hotline at 502-607-6844 or go to tinyurl.com/KYEMCOVID (https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/cdbec8a2257c47769d0eb7826d7d6b4f).

Travel into Kentucky

Gov. Beshear expanded a recent order (https://governor.ky.gov/attachments/20200402_Executive-Order_2020-266_State-of-Emergency.pdf) restricting travel to include people from out of state coming into the commonwealth. Anyone from out of state has to follow the same travel restrictions as Kentuckians.

“We have to make sure we don’t have people traveling in, staying two days and then leaving, because that frustrates everything we are trying to do right now,” the Governor said. “If someone has a family member from out of state and they want to come and ride it out with their family members, that’s fine. But once you get

here, you quarantine for 14 days and you don't go anywhere else. It's no different than any other state is doing. It's a precaution that all states should do and most states are doing."

Case information

As of 5 p.m. April 2, the Governor said there were 770 cases of COVID-19 (https://governor.ky.gov/attachments/20200402_COVID19_Case-Information.pdf) in Kentucky, 100 of which were newly confirmed. There were 11 new deaths reported Thursday, raising the state's toll to 31 deaths related to the virus.

Gov. Beshear said all but one of the deaths, and possibly all of them, were people with other health conditions.

"That is what this virus does. It goes after people who have other health conditions," the Governor said, adding that he wanted Kentuckians to join him in lighting their homes green in honor of the lives lost. "Let's recommit to making sure we do everything we can to make sure we don't have too many more days like today."

Key recent updates

Three critical steps keep focus on COVID-19 fight

Gov. Beshear asked Kentuckians to stay focused on three key steps that can be done here to blunt the deadly outbreak: social distancing, boosting testing and health care capacity. He asked everyone to help by maintaining good social distancing and staying safe at home. And the Governor said officials in government and industry were working tirelessly to add hospital beds, intensive-care units and ventilators to sites throughout the commonwealth.

Helping Kentucky workers

Josh Benton, deputy secretary of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet, said officials are working to fix problems brought on by an unprecedented surge in unemployment claims. Benton said the claims website, kcc.ky.gov (https://kcc.ky.gov/), has been completely revamped for ease of use and capacity was being continuously added to the call center. Gov. Beshear has expanded access for groups not normally eligible for unemployment insurance. Substitute teachers, freelance workers, small-business owners, restaurant workers and more can access a range of benefits.

Out-of-state travel restricted

Gov. Beshear issued an order March 30 restricting out-of-state travel by Kentuckians during the state of emergency. The decree allows for a range of exemptions, including travel to other states for work and groceries, to care for loved ones, to obtain health care and when required by a court order. Kentuckians arriving back in the commonwealth from out of state are required to self-quarantine for 14 days.

Team Kentucky Fund

Gov. Beshear, along with the Kentucky Public Protection Cabinet, took executive action (https://governor.ky.gov/attachments/20200323_Executive-Order_2020-253_Team-Kentucky-Fund.pdf) to establish the Team Kentucky Fund, a GoFundMe-style online platform to provide financial help to Kentuckians whose employment is affected by the coronavirus. The Governor has challenged those who are able to help to make a tax-deductible donation (https://secure.kentucky.gov/formservices/PPC/KYCOVID-19Donate) to the fund. On April 1, Gov. Beshear announced donations had surpassed $400,000. He also shared videos from University of Louisville men's basketball Coach Chris Mack

(https://twitter.com/GovAndyBeshear/status/1245474772491948033), UofL head football Coach Scott Satterfield (https://twitter.com/GovAndyBeshear/status/1244744952497782787) and University of Kentucky men's basketball Coach John Calipari (https://twitter.com/GovAndyBeshear/status/1243661291723599874) urging people to help their neighbors.

National Guard

Gov. Beshear called on the Kentucky National Guard to help feed the commonwealth's seniors, families and displaced workers during the coronavirus pandemic. National Guard members will deploy to four regional food bank warehouses to help sort, package and distribute that food through "no-touch" deliveries in communities across the commonwealth.

Alert: Testing scams

Gov. Beshear and Dr. Steven Stack, commissioner for the Department for Public Health, warned Kentuckians to be wary of coronavirus testing scams. The Governor said there were both at-home tests being sold and some drive-up testing operations being reported.

"You shouldn't be handing over your hard-earned and precious money to go get pop-up testing anywhere," said Dr. Stack, who urged anyone feeling ill or with questions to follow the state's guidance on when to call health care providers.

U.S. Census duty

Gov. Beshear reminded Kentuckians to complete the 2020 Census at 2020Census.gov (https://2020census.gov/) while staying healthy at home. "We want to make sure every single person in Kentucky is counted so our state receives the correct amount of federal funding over the next 10 years," the Governor said. "These dollars will help us recover from the health, social and economic impacts of COVID-19."

Federal disaster aid, CARES Act help Kentuckians

Gov. Beshear announced two moves by the federal government to help the commonwealth's coronavirus response and recovery efforts. The Major Disaster Declaration issued by President Donald Trump broadens access to the Public Assistance Program statewide to pay for emergency protective services. And the federal CARES Act provides a variety of assistance and hope to Kentuckians whose livelihoods have been harmed by the coronavirus outbreak and response. Among the provisions are a $600 raise to the maximum weekly benefit, an additional 13 weeks of coverage and expanded eligibility for unemployment insurance.

Orders help grocery workers, nursing industry

Grocery store workers can now receive the same emergency child care benefits that previously were extended to first responders and health care workers. Gov. Beshear said while the food supply remains safe, his administration wants to support the workers stocking shelves and manning the checkouts. Gov. Beshear also praised the Kentucky Board of Nursing for working with officials to moderate enforcement of some training and licensing requirements during the emergency. Among the issues addressed by a new order from the Governor: It eases restrictions on nurses who live out of state and makes it quicker to obtain a license.

Reporting hotline

Gov. Beshear announced the COVID-19 Reporting Hotline 833-KY SAFER (833-597-2337) for complaints about non-compliance with coronavirus mandates. Labor Cabinet personnel will monitor the hotline from 7:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. ET. Kentuckians can visit the website kysafer.ky.gov (https://kysafer.ky.gov/) to make online complaints.

To read about other key updates from Gov. Beshear visit the news section on governor.ky.gov (https://governor.ky.gov/news).

More Information
Gov. Beshear has taken decisive action to protect all Kentuckians since the first case was confirmed in the commonwealth. To read the full list of actions Gov. Beshear has taken to protect Kentuckians and limit the spread of the coronavirus, visit governor.ky.gov/covid19.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourages people to follow these steps to prevent illness (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fprevention-treatment.html). Kentuckians who want advice can call the state hotline at 800-722-5725 or call their local health care provider. To read Gov. Beshear's news releases and watch other news regarding COVID-19 visit governor.ky.gov (https://governor.ky.gov/news).

Each day at 5 p.m. ET, Gov. Beshear holds briefings for Kentuckians that are streamed online at his Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/GovAndyBeshear/) and YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/c/GovAndyBeshear) pages.

Gov. Beshear continues to urge Kentuckians to be cautious of rumors and depend on proven and good sources of news, including governor.ky.gov (https://governor.ky.gov/), kycovid19.ky.gov (https://govstatus.egov.com/kycovid19) and the Governor's official social media accounts Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/GovAndyBeshear/), Twitter (https://twitter.com/GovAndyBeshear) and YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/c/GovAndyBeshear).

Team Kentucky hashtags for social media
#TeamKentucky, #TogetherKY, #Patriot and #HealthyAtHome.

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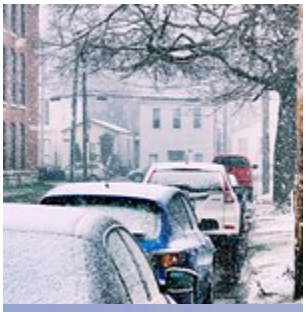
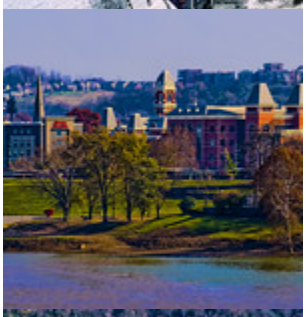
-  (https://www.flickr.com/photos/7372926@N06/47218320672/in/pool-773339@N20)
-  (https://www.flickr.com/photos/miamiboy/47184596121/in/pool-773339@N20)
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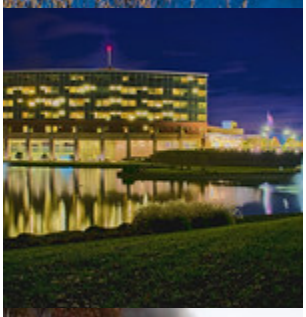
-  (https://www.flickr.com/photos/miamiboy/32275086277/in/pool-773339@N20)
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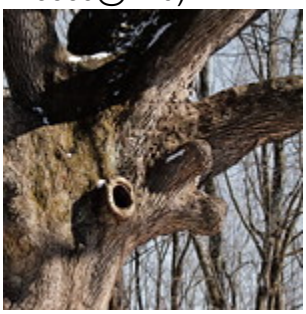
-  (https://www.flickr.com/photos/mcconnell_springs_photo_journal/46864760851/in/pool-773339@N20)
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