Burgum orders bars, restaurants closed to on-site patrons; provides additional guidance for K-12 schools

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BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Doug Burgum today signed an executive order directing bars and restaurants to close to on-site patrons and issued additional guidance for K-12 schools to continue to educate students with alternative delivery methods beginning April 1 during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) today confirmed 12 additional cases of COVID-19, including at least two additional cases of community spread, in which the source of the infection is unknown. The 12 new cases include nine cases in Burleigh County, two cases in Morton County and one case in Ward County. One individual is hospitalized. The state has tested 673 cases, including 19 positive cases.

Business access restricted

Under the executive order:

- All restaurants, bars, breweries, cafés and similar on-site dining establishments are closed to on-sale/on-site patrons as of noon Friday, March 20, and until Monday, April 6. Takeout, delivery, drive-through or off-sale services may continue.

- Recreational facilities, health clubs, athletic facilities and theaters, including movie theaters and music or entertainment venues, are directed to close and cease operations by noon Friday, March 20, and remain closed until April 6.

All state agencies and offices are directed to accelerate the transition of nonessential staff members to remote, in-home worksites; this requirement will continue until April 6.

The executive order also directs that public access to state facilities, including the North Dakota State Capitol, will be restricted effective immediately through April 6, 2020. Although access to the Capitol and other state facilities will be restricted, state services will continue to be available in alternative ways, such as online. By the end of today, the North Dakota Information Technology Department (NDIT) will have transitioned nearly 3,100 team members to platforms that allow for remote work.

“The health, safety and well-being of our citizens remains our top priority,” Burgum said. “With cases of community spread now confirmed in North Dakota, focusing on the health and well-being of Team ND members is crucial to ensuring continuity of government services for our citizens.”

Burgum emphasized that state government is not closing, but rather changing the way business is conducted during this unique and unprecedented time. A screening process is being developed to allow public access to several state facilities by appointment only. Until process is in effect, there will be no public access.

In a separate executive order, Burgum temporarily suspended certain licensure requirements for health care and behavioral health care workers to allow them to work in North Dakota if they’re appropriately licensed in another state.

School guidance provided

Burgum, with State Superintendent Kirsten Baesler, provided updated guidance to K-12 school districts after the governor on Sunday ordered schools closed this week to slow the spread of COVID-19 and provide time to gather more data, better assess coronavirus testing and treatment capability, and allow school districts to plan for educating their students in the event of an extended COVID-19 pandemic.

Under today's guidance, schools will remain closed to students until further notice, with access for essential staff only.

Burgum announced he plans to issue an executive order next week allowing age-appropriate, distance learning to count toward instructional hours. Districts will have until March 27 to submit their plans for resuming instruction with alternative methods and until April 1 to implement the plans and continue to receive state aid payments. Schools that are unable to resume instruction on April 1 must extend their academic school year in order to receive state aid payments for those instructional hours.

Burgum said he will waive all instructional hours for the period from March 23-March 31, meaning schools do not have to reschedule that time. Burgum also waived instructional hours this week, for a total of 12 days waived. These waivers ensure that districts will be able to pay teachers and hourly employees such as paraprofessionals, bus drivers, custodians, food service and other staff through this closure.

Superintendents John Pretzer of Scranton, Josh Johnson of Valley City and Mark Vollmer of Minot all delivered remarks at the press conference describing how their districts have prepared to resume instruction to students using alternative delivery methods including online delivery. Video of the press conference is available on the NDDoH Facebook page.

For the most updated and timely information related to COVID-19, visit the NDDoH website at www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus, follow them on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.

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