Alcohol and Gambling Enforcement

Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Driver and Vehicle Services

Emergency Communication Networks

Homeland Security and Emergency Management

Minnesota State Patrol

Office of Communications

Office of Justice Programs

Office of Pipeline Safety

Office of Traffic Safety

State Fire Marshal

NEWS RELEASE

Bruce Gordon, Director of Communications

CONTACT:
Bruce Gordon 651-201-7171
bruce.gordon@state.mn.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 27, 2020

SEOC Update #8: Minnesotans Prepare for First Weekend Under Gov. Tim Walz's Stay at Home Order

ST. PAUL — As Minnesotans prepare for their first weekend under Gov. Tim Walz's stay at home order that goes into effect tonight, the Minnesota DNR is closing state campgrounds and reminding Minnesotans heading outdoors to continue practicing social distancing. Other state agencies and volunteer organizations are also offering tips as Minnesotans work to prevent the spread of COVID-19 across the state. Minnesotans with questions about the stay at home order are encouraged to see the FAQs section of the Governor's COVID-19 website.

Staff from state agencies and volunteer organizations continue working from the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) to keep Minnesotans safe and coordinate efforts to provide essential services and information during the COVID-19 pandemic. The SEOC was activated to support state agencies with their COVID-19 response following Gov. Walz's executive order issuing a Peacetime State of Emergency in response to the pandemic.

SEOC hotline fielding stay at home order questions

The SEOC continues to be fully activated and staff from all state agencies, along with volunteer organizations, are working either physically or virtually. The SEOC is:

- Continuing to field questions to the hotline regarding business and school closures and child care. Staff from the departments of Education and Human Services are answering calls from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily at either 651-297-1304 or 800-657-3504.
    - The hotline received 737 calls on Thursday.
    - The focus of callers is shifting to Gov. Walz's stay at home order.
- Identifying and assessing the usefulness of alternate care sites. Officials hope to complete that work by the end of next week
- Working to fill 22 separate personal protective equipment orders for delivery today.
- Working with partner agencies to ensure first responders and medical professionals are reporting their needs to their local county emergency manager to help with the SEOC's coordination.

Here are today's updates and actions from state agencies and volunteer organizations:

Minnesota Department of Health reports fourth death

Global/National Update

- Worldwide: 551,000 cases and 25,000 deaths.
- U.S.: Surpassed China and Italy with approximately 86,012 cases (NY: 39,140; NJ: 6,876; CA: 4,040; WA: 3,207) and over 1,300 deaths.

Minnesota Update

- Total of 398 lab-confirmed cases in Minnesota – up 52 cases from March 26.
    - 4 reported deaths; all deaths are people in their 80s
    - Since the start of the outbreak, 51 patients in Minnesota have been hospitalized.
    - 34 patients currently hospitalized with 17 in intensive care; the rest are recovering at home.
    - See the latest situation report on the Minnesota Department of Health's website.
- There were 1,672 calls to MDH public hotline on March 26. The public hotline is open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. The number is 651-201-3920.
- There were 642,195 visits to MDH COVID-19 website on March 26.

Camping, lodging and rental facilities temporarily closed

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is temporarily closing campgrounds, lodging, and rental facilities until May 1, 2020, to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. This temporary closure applies to campgrounds and lodging in state parks, state recreation areas and state forests, as well as group rentals of day-use facilities like trail centers and enclosed picnic shelters.

- Between now and May 1, 2020, DNR will waive all cancellation and modification fees for camping and rental reservations, so Minnesotans can make changes to their travel plans free of charge. For cancellations made on Friday, March 27, 2020, please phone the reservation system call center at 866-857-2757. Beginning Saturday, March 28, 2020, cancellation and modification fees will be waived automatically for online transactions.
- DNR had previously canceled naturalist programs and closed all state park and recreation area visitor centers, contact stations, and other non-essential buildings. Some bathrooms will remain open at this time to support local day use. The additional closures are consistent with the Governor's Executive Order 20-20.
- Parks remain open for day use. Visitors can purchase permits online before heading to a state park or recreation area, or at self-pay stations located at park entrances. We have already observed crowding at some state parts and trails. Visitors must maintain social distancing and stay close to home when recreating outdoors.

Exam stations, deputy registrar and driver's license offices statewide closing for two weeks

All DVS exam stations, deputy registrar and driver's license agent offices will close statewide beginning Friday at the close of business to follow Gov. Walz's executive order for Minnesotans to stay home and slow the spread of COVID-19. Offices will stay closed through April 10, when the executive order is set to expire.

- Driver's licenses and ID cards
  - Once it reaches his desk, Gov. Walz is expected to sign a bill passed by Minnesota legislature that includes an extension for Minnesotans whose driver's licenses or ID cards expire during this time.
- Vehicle registration
  - Minnesotans will still be able to renew vehicle registrations online and by mail during the peacetime emergency. As such, there are no extensions for expired or expiring vehicle registrations.
- Road tests
  - Anyone who has a class D, commercial driver's license (CDL) or motorcycle road test appointment scheduled during this time will receive a cancellation notice by email or text message. Once normal operations resume, DPS-DVS will call, email or text those affected to offer the first available day and time for their road test.
- More information is available on the DVS website.

Minnesota schools report service of nearly 820,000 meals since March 18

- The Minnesota Department of Education MDE has asked districts and charter schools to self-report the daily number of meals they are serving to the school communities and the number of students receiving school-age care.
- The running count since March 18, 2020, with an average about 250 school districts and charter schools reporting a day:
  - 819,577 meals served
  - 26,514 school-age students cared for
- More information can be found on the MDE website.

Fire departments seeing increase in youth-set fires, a trend fire marshal expects to continue

The State Fire Marshal Division (SFMD) has seen an increase in youth-set fires in Minnesota over the past month. Stress and uncertainty in youth can be expressed in a number of ways, including in unexpected ways like starting fires. The SFMD is reminding parents:

- Talk to your kids about the dangers of fire as well as fire safety.
- Keep ignition devices like matches and lighters away from kids.
- Kids mimic behavior. Set a good example when using fire.

Check out the "For Parents" section on the SFMD's youth firesetting website.

Latest numbers: traffic volumes remain significantly decreased from same time last year

The Minnesota Department of Transportation continues to monitor traffic volumes.

- Traffic volumes were down 25 percent statewide March 26 compared with Thursday averages for March 2019.
- In the Twin Cities metro area: Traffic volumes on March 26 were down 31 percent from Thursday averages for March 2019.

Pedestrian and bicyclist traffic up nearly 20 percent

Since Friday, March 13 when Gov. Walz first declared the Peacetime Emergency in Minnesota, MnDOT has seen a nearly 20 percent increase in pedestrian and bicyclist traffic on trails and bikeways statewide. Motorists who need to be out traveling for essential reasons are reminded to watch closely for people walking and biking and stop for people crossing at intersections.

Seasonal rest areas will stay closed; all other rest areas remain open

MnDOT has indefinitely postponed the opening of 10 seasonal waysides. While these locations would typically begin reopening on April 1, they have limited resources, no running water, and are located primarily on recreational routes and are not designed to accommodate commercial truck parking. All other rest areas remain open, though some temporary closures due to facility improvements, construction or other reasons unrelated to COVID-19 are possible.

Minnesota State Veterans Cemeteries remain open for visitors who should practice social distancing

- The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) will be adopting restrictions effective Monday at 8 a.m. similar to those taking effect at all VA National Cemeteries.
    - Minnesota State Veterans Cemeteries will be open for direct transfer or direct interment only. Access to the cemetery administration offices will be limited to cemetery staff only. Cemetery Administrators are available to discuss this situation and respond to questions.
    - For more information, visit the MDVA website.

Minnesota Veterans Homes COVID-19 Information Line

- The correct local number for the Minnesota Veterans Homes COVID-19 Information Line is 651-757-1599. This number was incorrectly publicized earlier this week.
    - Families of Minnesota Veterans Homes residents can call this number any time to hear a recorded message from an MDVA leader who will provide the latest general updates.
    - The message will be updated every day.
    - The numbers are: 651-757-1599 OR 1-833-454-0147.

How to help the Minnesota Veterans Homes

Many people are asking how they can help the Minnesota Veterans Homes in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

- If you sew, you can donate face masks. View an instructional video. The Minnesota Veterans Homes would welcome any donations of facemasks to use if there is a shortage in our homes.
- The homes are also accepting donations including:
    - Handmade cards or drawings pictures
- The following items must be brand new:
    - Small craft kits (for individuals)
    - Adult coloring books
    - New small packs of crayons/colored pencils
    - DVDs — classic shows
    - Large piece puzzles (100-300 pieces)
    - MP3 players
    - Magazines — current and brand new
    - Easter baskets with wrapped candy — they could be assembled individually or provided for staff to assemble
- For more information, contact your local Minnesota Veterans Home.

Red Cross disaster relief adapts to stay at home order

- People can continue to rely on Red Cross disaster relief for home fires and other natural disasters during Minnesota's stay at home order. Disaster financial assistance and other resources like health and mental health services will be provided over the phone by trained volunteers.
- In the event of a large natural disaster, such as a tornado, the Red Cross will work with our emergency response partners, including the Minnesota Department of Health, to determine disaster shelter needs that ensure safety for disaster workers and people who are displaced.
- The Red Cross has downgraded the current need for blood and platelet donations from severe to critical. The need for blood is constant, and patients will need your life saving gift in the weeks ahead. If you don't see available appointments in the near future, please be sure to search 7-15 days out at redcrossblood.org.

Minnesota National Guard helps out by donating blood

The Minnesota Department of Military Affairs/Minnesota National Guard hosted a successful Red Cross Blood Drive at Camp Ripley Training Center on March 26.

Minnesota National Guard continues assisting state partners

The Minnesota National Guard continues supporting the Minnesota Department of Health by providing a logistic planning cell to assist in the further distribution of equipment.

- The Minnesota National Guard Joint Operations Center is running extended hour operations in support of COVID-19 supporting planning efforts and preparing for approve response requests.
- A total of six soldiers and airmen are mobilized for state active duty and 103 full-time staff are actively involved in preparing the Minnesota National Guard for any potential COVID-19 at the governor's direction.
- The National Guard continues coordinating with State Emergency Management Office and supporting SEOC operations with liaison officer support using full-time personnel.

State regulators call on Minnesota's electric and gas utilities to provide additional customer safeguards

The Minnesota Department of Commerce and the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) sent a letter to

all electric and gas utilities acknowledging steps that utilities have already take to safeguard customers. The letter offered a list of minimum actions requested for the duration of the national security or peacetime emergency:

- Extend protections of Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule.
- Waive late fees that any residential or small business customer incurs because of the economic circumstances related to the coronavirus pandemic.
- Arrange payment plans for customers requesting help during this time that is based on the financial resources and circumstances of the customer.

Utilities were asked to eFile responses to these specific requests by April 3. Minnesotans needing information or help with their utility service provider can contact the Consumer Affairs Office for assistance at consumer.puc@state.mn.us, 651-296-0406 or 1-800-657-3782.

Agency mimicking Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) sending messages to deaf community

DHS is aware of an outreach to the deaf community under the guise of the department's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division (DHHS) asking for personal information. DHS is issuing a GovDelivery message to its deaf and hard of hearing subscriber list to alert them.

Department of Corrections reports no confirmed cases of COVID-19 among staff or inmates

The Minnesota Department of Corrections began releasing daily updates about COVID-19 testing and results for inmates in the state's correctional facilities. As of March 27, 17 inmates have been tested for COVID-19. Ten tests were confirmed negative and the remaining seven tests are still pending. The DOC's daily updates, including testing data broken down by

facility and status, can be found here: https://mn.gov/doc/about/covid-19-updates/. The DOC is also not aware of any staff member testing positive for COVID-19 at this time.