NEWS RELEASE

Bruce Gordon, Director of Communications

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 24, 2020

SEOC Update #27: Governor, State Officials Remain Focused on Testing

ST. PAUL — Gov. Tim Walz announced a new COVID-19 testing website today that helps Minnesotans find testing locations in their communities. The site also provides an interactive screening tool to help people determine if they need a test.

Testing remains an important priority for Gov. Walz and officials working in the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) coordinating the state's COVID-19 response.

State officials work with CDC on staffing plans

The SEOC remains fully activated and staffed either physically or virtually by all state agencies and several volunteer organizations.

- SEOC officials are working with the CDC Response Corps to identify and potentially help staff positions in Minnesota as the Minnesota Department of Health develops plans for contact tracing and case investigation and part of the state's testing plans.
- Regional staff are working with Cottonwood County officials and Windom Hospital staff to ensure they have sufficient testing supplies.
- The SEOC continues to support the state hotline. The hotline received 68 calls April 23. Callers are asking about testing and returning people to the workforce. State employees are answering calls from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. at 651-297-1304 or 800-657-3504.

Drive-thru testing site for pork plant workers begins testing

The State Emergency Operations Center deployed an incident management team to Worthington this week to set up a drive-through testing site for JBS pork plant employees following the positive cases confirmed there this week. The site began testing yesterday. View a photo of the testing setup in this Facebook post. Public testing sites will be established across the state in the coming weeks as part of Gov. Walz's testing initiative.

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance payments heading to Minnesotans

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) announced today that the agency has begun making Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) payments to people who are self-employed, independent contractors, and other eligible recipients who are not eligible for regular unemployment benefits. PUA is a new program that was authorized by Congress in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and signed into law on March 27, 2020. Minnesota is one of the first states in the nation to implement all three components of the federal CARES Act and provide critical financial assistance to hundreds of thousands of people who have been impacted by this pandemic. Here's what Minnesotans need to know about applying for PUA:

If you have already applied for regular unemployment benefits, you do not need to do anything extra to qualify for PUA. DEED will automatically establish a PUA benefit account for you if you are eligible.

If you have not applied for unemployment benefits yet, special instructions for self-employed and 1,099 workers are available here. These instructions include steps you can take to make your account easily identifiable as potentially eligible for PUA.

Since March 16, 2020, a record number of more than 540,000 people have applied for unemployment insurance benefits in Minnesota. Despite this massive influx of applications,

the Minnesota UI program was able to quickly begin authorizing the additional FPUC $600 weekly payments, implement the 13-week extension of unemployment benefits (PEUC), and begin processing payments under PUA.

MDE announces extension of distance learning and new actions to help students

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has announced new actions to support Minnesota's educators, students and families. MDE will help teachers improve connections with students by partnering with experts and launching webinars to support educators during distance learning. The Education and Child Care working group will also work with private and public partners to get broadband access and devices to every student. MDE will partner with interagency groups to ensure every student has many adults in their lives checking in on them, communicating with families, and focusing on student well-being.

- Gov. Walz on April 23 directed Education Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker to extend the distance learning period through the end of the 2019-20 school calendar year. This decision was made with the safety and well-being of students, their families and school staff at the top of mind.
- As previously planned, student instruction will not be provided on May 1, 2020, or May 4, 2020. During these days, educators will prepare for the extension of the distance learning period. School districts and charter schools are expected to share their updated distance learning plans on their websites by May 5, 2020.
- During the extended distance learning period, school-age child care will continue to be available for the children of critical workers. Free, nutritious meals will also be available for children under the age of 18.
- MDE will continue to assess the efficacy of the programming and services and issue additional guidance for schools when necessary during the distance learning period. Guidance for schools and information for families about school-age child care can be found on the MDE COVID-19 website.
- MDE has created a variety of resources for students and families to help throughout the distance learning period. The Minnesota Children's Cabinet has also pulled together a resource document for families that includes information about health resources, economic assistance, housing, child care and food resources.

Minnesotans Can Apply for or Upgrade their Commercial Driver's License Online

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety Driver and Vehicle Services division launched a new online service allowing eligible Minnesotans to apply for a commercial driver's license (CDL) online while DVS exam stations and driver's license agent offices are closed due to COVID-19. This service is online at drive.mn.gov by selecting Apply for a Commercial Driver's License and following the prompts. It allows Minnesotans to:

- Upgrade from a commercial learners permit to a full CDL.
- Upgrade a current CDL to a higher class of CDL.
- Remove a restriction from their current CDL.
- Add endorsements to their current CDL.

More information, including requirements, is on the DVS website.

Number of COVID-19 cases cracks 3,000 mark in Minnesota

- 221 reported deaths — an increase of 21 since April 23; 18 of the 21 deaths were residents in long-term care facilities.
- 3,185 lab-confirmed cases in Minnesota — an increase of 243 cases since April 23.
- 278 patients are currently hospitalized with 111 in intensive care units (ICU). The number of ICU patients is up seven from April 23.
- 1,594 patients have been released from isolation.
- Learn more about the latest lab-diagnosed cases on the COVID-19 public dashboard.

DHS hosting a refugee and immigrant briefing next week

The Resettlement Programs Office at the Minnesota Department of Human Services is cohosting a refugee and immigrant briefing with Voices in the Wilderness for Swahili speakers on April 28 at 10:30 a.m. State leaders from Minnesota department of Health, Education, and Employment and Economic Development will be sharing information and answering questions on the call. The call will be in English and Swahili. Calls translated into other languages are being scheduled for the coming weeks. For more information and if you have an interest in hosting a call in other languages, contact Patricia Fenrick.

Traffic volumes creep up but remain below 2019 numbers

The Minnesota Department of Transportation continues to monitor traffic volumes statewide.

- Metro area: Traffic volumes on Thursday, April 23 were down 23 percent compared to Thursday averages for April 2019.
- Statewide: Traffic volumes on Thursday, April 23 were down 18 percent compared to Thursday averages for April 2019.