COVID-19 Bulletin #1 - March 17, 2020

Tuesday, March 17, 2020 | 06:00pm

Governor Bill Lee's daily press conferences can be viewed live each day this week through Thursday at 3 p.m. CT here . Gov. Lee has also established a website specific to COVID-19 updates which can be found here .

Announcements

COVID-19 Testing Sites

Remote assessment sites for COVID-19 are quickly becoming available through the help of private providers. Remote assessment sites, casually referred to as "drive through testing" allow Tennesseans to safely pursue COVID-19 testing without creating unnecessary risks in traditional clinical settings. The updated list of remote assessment sites is available here .

School Closures

On Monday, March 16, Gov. Lee urged school districts across Tennessee to close by Friday, March 20, and all districts have agreed to do so.

Below is Gov. Lee's full statement :

"As the response to COVID-19 evolves, I urge every school district in Tennessee to close as soon as practically possible, with all schools expected to close by Friday, March 20, 2020 at the latest. Schools should remain closed through March 31, 2020 to further mitigate the spread of this infectious disease and we will issue further guidance prior to March 31. Superintendents and local leadership have the full support of my administration to determine effective dates for closure this week as they evaluate what is best for families within their respective districts. We understand the tremendous burden school closure places on families, and we will continue to work with both the federal government and school districts to ensure we continue essential supports like meals for students in need. Every Tennessean has a role to play in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and I urge Tennesseans to be quick to help neighbors as new needs surface with the closure of schools."

Essential Supports for Students Continue Through Closure

The Department of Education applied for and received two nutrition waivers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide School Food Authorities (SFAs) flexibility to continue to provide meals to at-risk students who rely on meals. This will permit eligible districts to serve meals in a flexible delivery model. Additional information can be found here .

Department Actions for Targeted Relief

Child Care Facilities

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- We are encouraging child care facilities to remain open to continue to meet growing needs in their communities. Each facility will decide whether to remain open based on the needs in their own community.

- Gov. Lee has directed the Department of Human Services to relax the regulatory burden on child care centers.

- To support these efforts, the administration is providing $10 million in COVID-19 emergency response and recovery grants to support existing child care facilities that are facing greater needs.

- Child care facilities that currently receive subsidies will continue to receive them regardless of a potential loss in the wake of COVID-19 through the end of March.

- As Tennesseans step up and consider providing child care for friends and neighbors, please contact the Department of Human Services here for guidance on how to safely accomplish this especially in the wake of COVID-19.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

- The Tennessee Department of Human Services has issued a new policy offering emergency cash assistance for those impacted at this time by utilizing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds.

- These funds will be up to $1,000 for a family of 5+ who qualifies and has had a loss of a job as a result of COVID-19.

- These efforts will be up and working within one week, and we encourage Tennesseans in need to apply online when the application becomes available here .

Expanded Unemployment Relief

- The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development is actively working with economists to determine how economic downturn could affect our state's economy and how to best use the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund .

- The department will extend unemployment benefits to employees who suddenly find themselves out of work as businesses temporarily cease operations during the pandemic.

- The department is also extending unemployment benefits to those who are quarantined by a physician for COVID-19 and are temporarily away from their job.

- The department is also working with the federal government to gain more flexibility in job search requirements.

- The department is suspending certain regulations so those who are approved will get paid more quickly.

- Tennesseans are encouraged to apply online here .

Relief for Local Governments

- The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a strain on local governments.

- Gov. Lee's amended budget includes $200 million to provide specific support and relief to our county and city governments in

Gov. Lee's amended budget includes $200 million to provide specific support and relief to our county and city governments in the wake of this pandemic.

Current Department of Health Testing Results (as of 2 p.m. 3/17)

Testing Location	Total COVID-19 Tests Completed	Number Negative	Number Positive
TN State Public Health Laboratory	352	330	22
All other commercial and private laboratories	--	--	51
Total positives in TN			73

For more information on COVID-19 in Tennessee, please visit the Tennessee Department of Health's website here .