COVID-19 UPDATE: Gov. Justice announces West Virginia schools to remain closed for rest of academic year

4/21/2020

CHARLESTON, WV – Gov. Jim Justice joined West Virginia health leaders and other officials today for his latest daily press briefing regarding the State's COVID-19 response.

WEST VIRGINIA SCHOOLS TO REMAIN CLOSED

Gov. Justice announced today that all pre-kindergarten through 12th grade schools in West Virginia will remain closed for the rest of the 2019-2020 academic year.

"I was really hopeful and I tried in every way to get us to where we would be able to go back to school because I know how much the kids would appreciate it...just the excitement of the kids going back and seeing their friends and their teachers," Gov. Justice said. "But I've promised you over and over that I would never put you in a position that could be harmful. I promised that I would try to protect you in every way. And the bottom line is that this is what we have to do to protect everyone."

School buildings and facilities will remain closed while remote learning continues through the end of the school year. Meal delivery programs for students will also continue to operate through the end of the school year.

Gov. Justice also encouraged all schools statewide to begin looking for ways to safely hold graduation ceremonies to celebrate the academic accomplishments of outgoing seniors across West Virginia.

"We need to graduate our seniors," Gov. Justice said. "I would urge each and every school to try to find a way, over the course of the summer, to celebrate their accomplishments.

"I hate this like crazy for our families who have kids that have worked so hard for so long to be able to receive that diploma," Gov. Justice continued. "It is so meaningful to lots and lots of families and lots of lots of kids. So, again, I would urge all schools to find a way to pull a celebration off.

"For all the children who are out there, please continue to try and keep up with your studies and all the stuff that you're doing right now. Run through the finish line.

Accomplish all you can accomplish this year."

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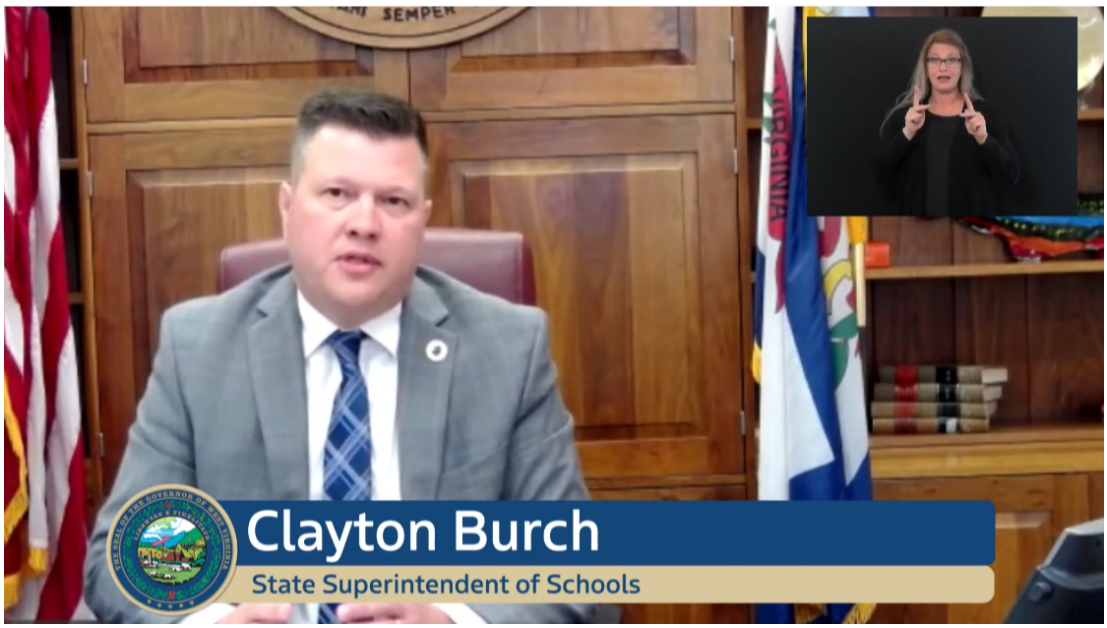
State Superintendent of Schools Clayton Burch joined the Governor on Tuesday for the announcement.

"Governor Justice has shown great leadership in the face of very difficult circumstances. He took this decision very seriously," Superintendent Burch said. "I know he really was optimistic that our children would have some time together and the end of the school year and just came to a realization that it was going to be really tough. And decisions of that magnitude are really, really difficult to make.

"So, I can tell you that being in his presence and watching him go through that process to come to this conclusion was really, really tough. But we also were very clear with the Governor that our school systems are ready. We believe that our children, all 260,000 of them in public schools, are being supported by our system."



EDUCATION TASK FORCE SUSTAINING STUDENT SUPPORT THROUGH END OF SCHOOL YEAR

The announcement that schools will remain closed provides a framework for counties to plan for the end of the school year.

A Graduation Task Force, which consists of West Virginia Board of Education members, county administrators, state PTA members, educators, and WVDE staff, continues to address issues surrounding high school graduation and creating a smooth transition for graduates moving toward the next phases of their lives.

Counties will work with their boards of education and local health departments to determine details around graduation ceremonies which may look very different than in years past. The WVDE will post updated school calendar information this week at **wvde.us/COVID19** (https://wvde.us/COVID19/).

On Tuesday, Superintendent Burch provided additional updates on ways the West Virginia Department of Education and others are working to improve opportunities for students during this challenging time.

"The College Board has come forward. They're going to make sure there are no gaps in children who are taking the AP Exam, they're going to make sure those are available to them," Superintendent Burch said. "The Higher Education Policy Commission has come forward to help us make sure all dual credits are complete – that all students finish that. We are also making sure that all children that are in a CTE program have the ability to finish and become a CTE completer."

Burch also announced that the WVDE is going to cover the cost of all virtual school for high school students this summer and reported that any junior who missed the SAT will be able to take the exam in the fall for free.

Click here to read more (https://wvde.us/the-west-virginia-department-of-education-and-counties-sustain-student-support-through-end-of-school-year/)

HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS TO RECEIVE FEDERAL FUNDING

Also today, Gov. Justice discussed students in higher education who are in-line to receive money from the federal government. The Governor said that while the money has not been distributed to the State yet, it is expected soon. And once it arrives, the funding will be distributed quickly.

"I know college students and their families are eager to receive these funds," Gov. Justice said. "Higher Education Policy Commission Chancellor Sarah Tucker has assured me that as soon as our colleges and universities receive the money from the federal government, they will be distributing it to the students."

WEST VIRGINIA TESTING NUMBERS ABOVE NATIONAL AVERAGE; BETTER THAN ALL BORDERING STATES

Additionally today, Gov. Justice provided an update on the rate of West Virginians who have been tested for COVID-19.

During his remarks, the Governor announced that West Virginia has now passed up all of its bordering states in terms of the percentage of the overall population that has been tested. In fact, West Virginia's testing rate currently exceeds the national average.

Visit **Coronavirus.wv.gov** (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx) to view the most up-to-date COVID-19 testing numbers. The data highlighted by Gov. Justice today can be viewed on Page 8 of the dashboard.

"We have not even input all of the testing we're doing on our nursing homes," Gov. Justice said.

Last week, Gov. Justice signed an **Executive Order** (/Documents /2020%20Executive%20Orders/Executive-Order-April-17-2020-Nursing-Home-Testing.pdf), making West Virginia the **first state in the country to require the testing of all nursing home residents and staff members statewide** (/News /press-releases/2020/Pages/COVID-19-UPDATE-West-Virginia-becomes-first-state-in-nation-to-begin-testing-all-nursing-home-residents-and-staff.aspx).

"For those of you concerned that West Virginia is not testing, that's not true," Gov. Justice said. "We're absolutely testing and we're aggressively after that."

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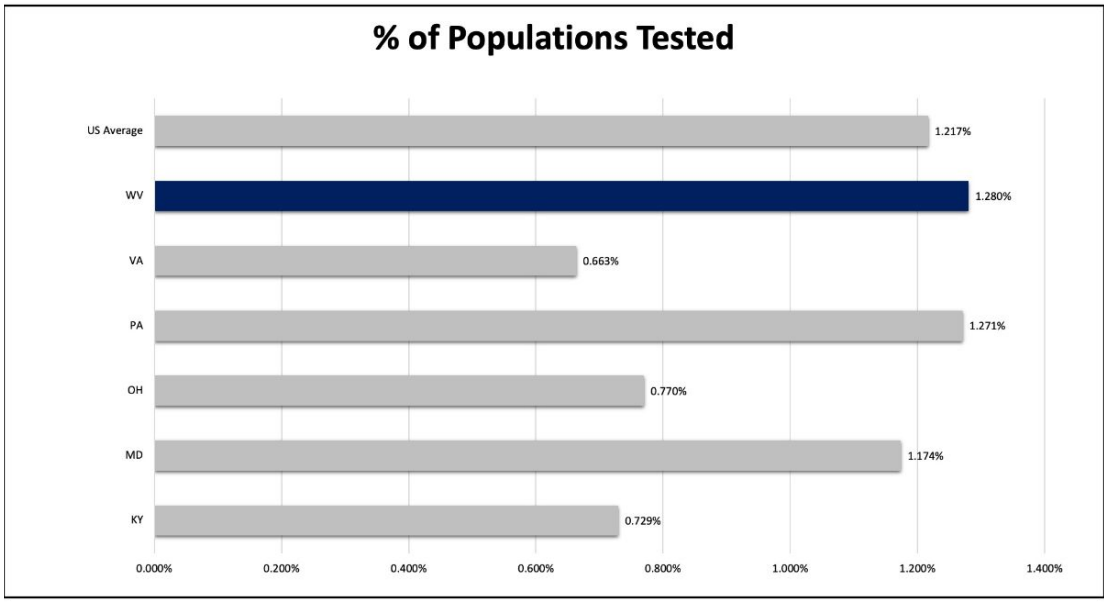

(https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx)

GOV. JUSTICE WANTS TO GET BACK TO WORK SAFELY AND QUICKLY

Gov. Justice also provided an update on his plans to get all West Virginians back to work as quickly and safely as possible.

"There's nobody on the planet that wants us to go back to work any more than I do," Gov. Justice said. "But, I have a tremendous responsibility to everyone, and that is to try to protect you and keep you as safe as I possibly can.

"What we want to do is we want to move as quickly as we possibly can with the guidance, first and foremost, of the medical experts in telling us the pathway to get us to the finish line without us having to back up.

"If we'll just stay the course and stay patient, we're going to get through this. And this will be long, long back in the rear view mirror very soon."

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GOV. JUSTICE PROVIDES UPDATE ON WEST VIRGINIA'S PROGRESS FIGHTING COVID-19 IN NATIONAL INTERVIEW

Also on Tuesday, Gov. Justice was interviewed on the national radio program, *Breitbart News Daily*, about West Virginia's early success in fighting the spread of COVID-19.

"We've been really proactive," Gov. Justice said in the interview. "We've got the least number of cases east of the Mississippi River and we're within a rock's throw of two-thirds of the population of this whole country.

"We declared a State of Emergency before we ever had a positive case," Gov. Justice continued. "We did a lot of things, in terms of pushing the right buttons, and I think that's more of a blessing from the good Lord because we happened to be a good bit ahead of the curve.

"My read was really simple, and it was that there's no way in the world the President of the United States of America is going to shut down the engine of America [the economy] unless he knows this thing is really, really potentially devastating beyond belief. And so, my read on that was to jump out ahead and act as proactively as I could."

Listen to Gov. Justice's full interview here (https://www.breitbart.com/radio/2020/04/21/gov-jim-justice-coronavirus-may-drive-urban-exodus-return-to-rural-life/)

GOVERNOR, DHHR ANNOUNCE SMARTPHONE APP FOR INDIVIDUALS IN RECOVERY ISOLATED DURING PANDEMIC

In response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gov. Jim Justice and the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources' (DHHR) Office of Drug Control Policy today announced a free smartphone app to reduce isolation and offer support resources to West Virginians with Substance Use Disorder (SUD).

The Connections app will allow treatment providers across the state to stay connected and engaged with their patients.

"Over the past few years, we've made tremendous progress in our fight against the opioid epidemic in West Virginia. We've given people struggling with addiction real hope and access to opportunities like never before," Gov. Justice said. "But, as we've had to separate from each other to try to slow the spread of the coronavirus, it's been really tough on those who may truly need the support of others to stay on a path toward recovery.

"We need to do everything in our power to keep helping these people move forward in their lives, not backward. That's exactly what this app is going to allow us to do."

Click here to read more (https://dhhr.wv.gov/News/2020/Pages/Gov.-Justice,-DHHR-announce-smartphone-app-for-individuals-in-recovery-from-Substance-Use-Disorder.aspx)

ATTORNEY GENERAL WARNS OF CARES ACT STIMULUS CHECK SCAM

West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey issued a consumer alert Tuesday, warning of a CARES Act stimulus check scam.

Nearly every American is set to receive such a check. The CARES Act provides a check for $1,200 for most adults, $2,400 for most couples, and $500 per child per household.

The Attorney General alerts consumers that thieves may call, email, and text West Virginians. They falsely claim people must first provide their bank account, Social Security number, or other personally identifiable information to receive the checks.

"Let me be clear: You do not need to provide information to any third party in order to get your $1,200 or anything else you're supposed to receive under the CARES Act," Attorney General Morrisey said. "Whether you're talking about the $1,200 or the Paycheck Protection Program loans for small businesses, make sure you follow only the guidance from our office or the federal government because the scammers only want to steal from you."

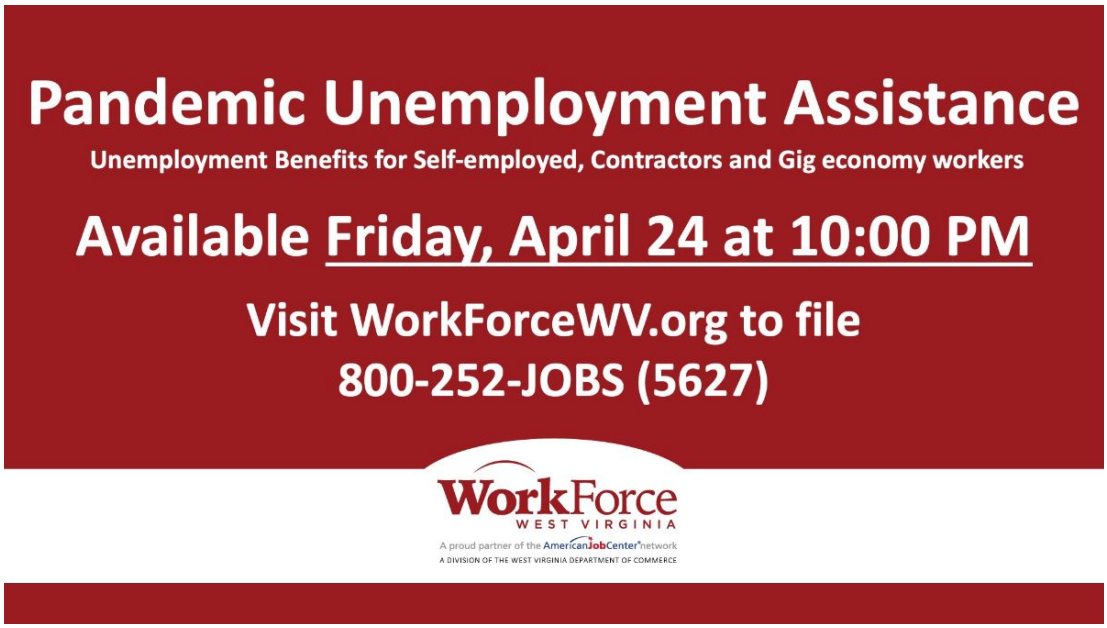
Click here to read more (https://mailchi.mp/wvago/wva-agwarns-of-cares-act-stimulus-check-scam)

UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS UPDATE

Gov. Justice also provided an update on WorkForce West Virginia's efforts to process the wave of unemployment claims that have been filed since March, reporting that more than 12,000 claims were processed yesterday alone.

"They're completely on track to have the entire backlog done by tomorrow night," Gov. Justice said. "They're also on track, as far as self-employed workers, independent contractors, and workers who do not have work histories can apply for unemployment benefits as of 10 p.m. Friday night."

Click here for more information on applying for unemployment benefits (https://workforcewv.org/)



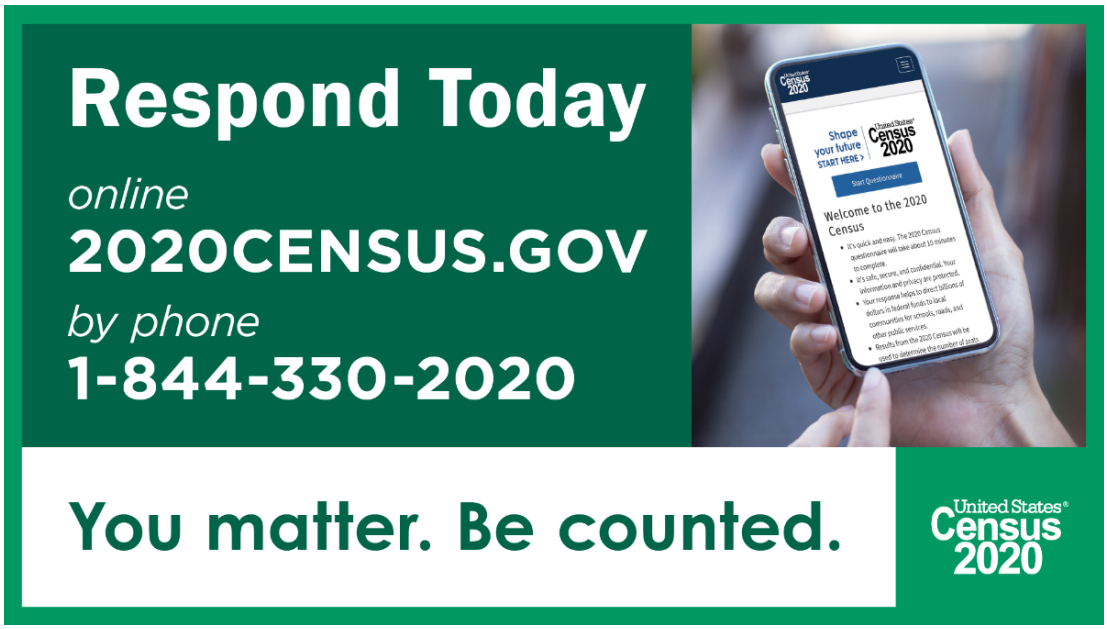
(https://workforcewv.org/)

WEST VIRGINIANS REMINDED TO BE COUNTED IN CENSUS

Gov. Justice once again reminded all West Virginians to take the opportunity to complete the 2020 United States Census.

Every West Virginian who does not respond to the Census represents a loss of $20,000 in federal funds over the next ten years for the state and its local communities. The funds can go toward things like healthcare, education, infrastructure, school lunch programs, and more.

Respond to the Census online at **2020census.gov** (https://2020census.gov/).



(https://2020census.gov/)

WEST VIRGINIA NATIONAL GUARD MAKING PROGRESS ON NURSING HOME TESTING

The West Virginia National Guard is making progress in the testing of all nursing home facilities in the state, following an Executive Order from Governor Jim Justice to accomplish the task in coordination with the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources and the West Virginia Health Care Association.

Yesterday, two veterans home facilities in Barboursville and Clarksburg were tested, which totaled 411 patients and staff. Testing will take place tomorrow at Morgantown Health and Rehabilitation for approximately 120 people and 14 other nursing homes have identified a need for WVNG assistance in conducting COVID-19 testing at their facility.

"We are working to meet Governor Justice's intent to have all nursing homes tested this week," said Maj. Gen. James Hoyer, adjutant general of the WVNG. "Thanks to the work of our public health partners at DHHR and the County Health Departments, nursing home administrators and staff, all the laboratory workers and Lab Corps for the assistance in expanding testing capabilities, we believe we can come very close to meeting that goal."

Click here to read more (https://www.wv.ng.mil/News/Article/2158481/wva-guard-making-progress-on-nursing-home-testing-increasing-sanitization-missi/)

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Click here to view all Executive Orders and other actions (/Pages/WV-COVID-19-actions-and-executive-orders.aspx) taken by Gov. Justice to combat the spread of COVID-19 in West Virginia.

For more information about COVID-19 prevention and more, call the State's toll-free hotline at **1-800-887-4304** or visit **Coronavirus.wv.gov** (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx).

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