

March 24, 2020

Today I issued a directive to extend closures of public schools and dine-in food service and alcoholic beverage businesses through April 10th. I also mandated social distancing measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 in Montana and took actions to give our front-line healthcare workers the resources and support they need to do their incredibly difficult jobs.

Yesterday, we saw a 25% increase of our COVID-positive population. And, while I wish it were otherwise, I certainly expect those numbers to increase, as some community spread occurs and as further testing is done.

That is reason for real concern. It is the actions we are taking today – and actions businesses, individuals and each of us take today and in the immediate future that will lessen the spread in Montana.

For the most up to date information regarding COVID-19 in Montana, please visit: <https://covid19.mt.gov/>

SCHOOLS: School closures have been extended through April 10th. School districts were instructed last week to create plans, in the event of future closures, for providing (1) education through remote learning, where possible, (2) school meal services, where possible, (3) services for students with disabilities, and (4) other services customarily provided to children in school. Please reach out to your school district superintendent for any questions you have about your district and its plans.

School district contact information, as well as online learning resources, are available through the COVID19 website maintained by the Office of Public Instruction: <http://opi.mt.gov/COVID-19-Information>

SOCIAL DISTANCING: Effective immediately, non-essential social and recreational gatherings of individuals outside of a home or place of residence greater than **ten** people are prohibited, if a distance of at least six feet between individuals cannot be maintained. This measure is consistent with actions taken in other states to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Retail businesses are also required to establish, implement, and enforce social distancing policies to ensure a minimum of **six feet** between customers, **effective March 28, 2020**. This requirement does not apply to **grocery, health care, medical, or pharmacy services**, although they are encouraged to comply with social distancing protocols and worker safety measures if possible.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: I also announced measures to give local governments the

flexibility they need to adhere to social distancing guidelines and do their part in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

My Directive suspends certain office hours requirements in state law to allow for limited closures where local governments cannot safely operate within social distancing guidelines. The Directive does not allow suspension of hours for offices that are required to maintain public health and safety.

I'm pleased that local governments know they can play a key role in slowing the virus and are taking social distancing measures seriously. Today's action will keep the public and local government employees safe while maintaining the local services Montanans rely on.

HOSPITALS AND HEALTHCARE WORKERS: Montana is also preparing for a potential surge of patients needing hospital care. On Monday, I announced a Directive that temporarily waives the bidding process to quickly procure or distribute emergency supplies or contract for additional space to care for patients. Additionally, the directive streamlines the process for releasing patients and discharging them back to their home communities without delay as they recover, which will free up beds and equipment for new patients.

As Montanans, we have an obligation to slow the spread of this virus. Our fellow Montanans can all continue to set a good example for each other in adhering to social distancing directives – and know that it will save lives. For every person who stays at home and avoids non-essential gatherings, the better our chances to fight this virus and protect our front line health care workers and emergency responders.

Thank you all again for the comments you have sent my office and sharing this information with others in your community. We must take COVID-19 seriously, and we must prepare for the curve to go up. But with continued focus on the working together as Montanans, our state can get out in front of this and save lives.

Sincerely,

STEVE BULLOCK
Governor