



CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

STATE SENATOR TONY LUETKEMEYER

Information Regarding the State's Response to the Coronavirus

As Missourians hunker down to limit the spread of the coronavirus, it's important that we base our actions on facts. Unfortunately, rumors spread faster than the virus. With the situation changing rapidly, we need timely information. The resources referenced below provide updates on this evolving threat.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services is coordinating our state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Visit health.mo.gov to find the latest information about the spread of the coronavirus in Missouri, as well as steps you should take to minimize exposing yourself or others. The department has also established a 24-hour hotline at 877-435-8411 to address citizen concerns and questions about the virus.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website, www.cdc.gov, provides comprehensive coverage of the pandemic. In my opinion, it is the best source of accurate, up-to-date information about the federal response and recommendations for limiting the virus' reach. The site includes a thorough discussion of likely symptoms and what you should do if you feel ill or have been exposed.

Each of these resources will share similar advice:

- Limit exposure to other people by maintaining appropriate social distance. Do not visit places where crowds of people gather. Do not hug, shake hands or stand closely to other people. Do not invite visitors into your home or call on friends and family unless absolutely necessary.

- Wash your hands frequently. If alcohol-based sanitizers aren't available, use soap and hot water and wash for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth or face with unwashed hands.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Clean and disinfect highly-used surfaces.
- Stay home if you're sick.
- Follow instructions provided by public health officials.

Missourians who need to consult with a doctor, but don't want to travel have a new option. MU Health Care is offering video visits with a health care provider. It's free to enroll, and the cost of each video visit is just \$10. You'll need a computer, tablet or smartphone with a camera and a microphone to use the service. For more information, visit www.muhealth.org/conditions-treatments/video-visits.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

The best strategy for combating the spread of the coronavirus is to limit the opportunities for infection. Countries that are weeks ahead of the United States in this struggle have achieved the most success by restricting human interaction. Guidance issued by the White House – "[15 Days to Slow the Spread](#)" – recommends working or attending school from home, avoiding social gatherings of 10 or more people, using drive-through or delivery options instead of visiting restaurants and bars and delaying all discretionary travel. The president specifically asks us to forgo visiting nursing homes and long-term care facilities to avoid infecting older, vulnerable citizens.

Missouri's governor has declared a state of emergency and recommends cancelling or suspending public gatherings of ten individuals or more, with the exception of educational institutions, daycare facilities, and business operations. State agencies are heeding his call. Missouri's seven Veteran's Homes are temporarily off-limits to visitors, as are prisons. The Supreme Court has instructed all of Missouri's appellate and circuit courts (including all associate, family, juvenile, municipal and probate divisions) to suspend in-person proceedings through April 3. The Missouri Highway Patrol has stopped conducting road exams for driver's licenses through March 31.

Programs and events sponsored by Missouri State Parks are cancelled through April 30, though state park visitor's centers will remain open. Missouri public colleges and universities will hold classes online through the end of the semester and have cancelled all group activities and sporting events. Foreign travel and study abroad programs are suspended and students are being brought home from overseas.

The Missouri Gaming Commission has instructed all casinos under its jurisdiction to close until March 30. The Platte County Health Department has announced the suspension of dine-in services at restaurants in the county. Restaurants will still be able to provide curbside pickup and drive-thru window services. The announcement follows similar actions in the Kansas City metro area.

The Missouri General Assembly currently stands in recess, and lawmakers are scheduled to return to the State Capitol on March 30. During this time, lawmakers and staff are working remotely to ensure services are still provided to the citizens of Missouri.

INFORMATION FOR BUSINESSES

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) offers loans and other resources for businesses affected by the coronavirus outbreak. The SBA has approved Missouri's request for assistance through the agency's Economic Injury Disaster Loan program. Visit www.sba.gov for more information.

The SBA encourages all businesses to insist that sick employees stay home. If one of your workers shows symptoms or feels ill, separate them from other employees and send them home. Step up your cleaning routines. Limit or eliminate travel.

An online publication, "Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19," is available at the www.osha.gov website.

UTILITY INFORMATION

Evergy and Liberty Utilities have both announced they will temporarily suspend disconnection of electric service for residential and small business consumers. Platte-Clay Electric Cooperative and United Electric Cooperative are committed to working with their members to avoid disconnection during the COVID-19 crisis. Missouri-American Water issued a statement assuring customers that its water supply is safe and its treatment methods are effective in removing or inactivating viruses. The company has also announced the temporary suspension of disconnections for non-payment. I would caution everyone that these disconnection waivers are temporary. The bills will eventually need to be paid so every effort should be made to stay current, if possible.

SCHOOLS RESPOND TO THE VIRUS

According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), all 555 Missouri school districts and charter schools have temporarily closed their doors due to the impact of the COVID-19 virus. For current information regarding the coronavirus' impact on our state's schools, please visit dese.mo.gov. In addition to guidance for school administrators and teachers, the site offers information on the status of scheduled conferences and other educational events. ACT college entrance exams scheduled for April 4 have been rescheduled.

The closure of schools due to the coronavirus outbreak could cause many districts to fall below attendance thresholds for funding under Missouri's Foundation Formula. I am committed to ensuring full funding for our schools and will join with my colleagues in addressing this issue when the Legislature returns to the Capitol.

I understand that Missourians are concerned about the pandemic. Your concerns are understandable, as we have not faced a situation like this in generations. Please understand that our state and national public health experts have watched events unfold around the globe and are committed to mitigating the worst possible outcomes here in our country. Hospitals and other health care facilities have been overwhelmed in Asia and Europe by the exponential spread of this virus. The only thing that has allowed these countries to begin recovery has been placing limits on human contact. I understand some of these measures seem drastic, but I believe following the guidelines provided by

America's public health agencies offers our best path for getting through this pandemic. We will get through it, if we all work together and do our part.

As always, it's my pleasure to represent you in the Missouri Senate. Please be sure to follow me on Facebook or Twitter for up-to-date information on this ever-changing situation.