



March 24, 2020

## **UPDATE: Coronavirus—What You Need to Know**

Not long ago, the COVID-19 virus seemed a distant threat, confined to Asia or Europe. Now, it's impacting all of us. On March 23, the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported in both Buchanan and Platte counties.

We've all been asked to make major changes in our daily lives to reduce the spread of COVID-19. For all of us, these changes are disruptive, stressful and unexpected. But regardless of whether these new rules come from the president, the governor, mayors or local health agencies, all share the same goal: to slow the virus.

### **THE GOVERNOR'S STATEWIDE ORDER**

On March 21, the governor issued an order enforcing social distancing practices statewide. All Missourians are instructed to avoid non-essential gatherings in groups larger than 10 people. Visitation to nursing homes, long-term care facilities, retirement homes or assisted living homes is prohibited, except to provide critical assistance.

As of March 23, state office buildings are now closed to the public. This includes the State Capitol as well as visitor centers at state parks and conservation areas. Visitation to Missouri's veteran's homes and correctional facilities is not allowed.

With few exceptions, the governor's order **does not** require private businesses to close. However, local health ordinances in our cities and counties require such closures, as discussed below.

For more information about the coronavirus in Missouri, including what to do if you think you have symptoms, please visit [www.health.mo.gov](http://www.health.mo.gov).

## **LOCAL "STAY-HOME" ORDERS**

In addition to the governor's executive order, both the mayors of St. Joseph and Kansas City, as well as the health department of Platte County have issued "stay-at-home" orders. Kansas City and Platte County's orders are currently scheduled to be in effect until April 24, while St. Joseph's order is set to expire April 2, unless extended. In general, residents covered by these orders are still permitted to leave their homes to go grocery shopping, go outside to exercise, pick up food at restaurants, seek medical treatment, care for family members and friends and go to work at "**essential businesses.**"

Some of the common "essential businesses" exempt from the orders, which may remain open, include:

- Health care facilities (including hospitals, doctors, dentists and pharmacies)
- Childcare facilities
- Restaurants (limited to delivery, curbside pickup, and drive-thru)
- Grocery stores
- Sanitation services
- Transportation (including gas stations)
- Financial services (including banks and insurance)
- Manufacturing
- Maintenance
- Construction
- Mailing and shipping
- Government operations (though most government offices are closed to the public)

Non-essential businesses may be required to close temporarily, unless they have "work-from-home" capabilities for employees.

More complete information about each of the local ordinances can be found on the websites

for Kansas City ([www.kcmo.gov](http://www.kcmo.gov)), St. Joseph ([www.stjoemo.info](http://www.stjoemo.info)) and the Platte County Health Department ([www.plattecountyhealthdept.com](http://www.plattecountyhealthdept.com)). In addition, the St. Joseph Chamber of Commerce ([www.saintjoseph.com](http://www.saintjoseph.com)) provides St. Joseph-specific COVID-19 guidance on its website for business owners and employees.

## **THE NATIONAL RESPONSE**

The federal government is setting up temporary hospitals in New York and California. The president announced he will also deploy America's two military hospital ships to relieve overrun health care facilities. Meanwhile, the federal government has been working around the clock with scientists, the FDA and infectious disease doctors to find effective treatments and develop a vaccine for COVID-19. For up-to-date information on steps the U.S. government is taking to combat the pandemic, visit [www.usa.gov/coronavirus](http://www.usa.gov/coronavirus). The federal Centers for Disease Control ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) remain one of the best sources for reliable information about the pandemic, as does the Johns Hopkins coronavirus research center ([www.coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html](http://www.coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html)).

## **BUSINESSES AND EMPLOYEES**

Missouri businesses are now eligible for financial assistance through the U.S. Small Business Administration's Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program. Businesses may request up to \$2 million in SBA assistance to pay for fixed debts, payroll, accounts payable and other expenses that cannot be met due to the loss of business during the COVID-19 outbreak. For more information, or to apply online, visit [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov) or call [1-800-659-2955](tel:1-800-659-2955).

The Missouri Department of Labor has a website (<https://labor.mo.gov/coronavirus>) for employers and individuals facing layoffs due to COVID-19. This resource provides information about unemployment benefits, including how to file claims.

## **TAXES AND LICENSES**

The filing deadline for both state and federal tax returns has been extended from April 15 to July 15. The Missouri Department of Revenue also implemented automatic 60-day extensions for driver's license and motor vehicle registrations. Motor vehicle inspections will remain valid for an additional 60 days, as well. Driver's license testing has been suspended.

## **SCHOOLS**

By the governor's order, public elementary and secondary schools in Missouri are closed at least through April 6. Statewide MAP tests have been canceled. ACT tests scheduled for April have been postponed until June. Schools will not be required to make up hours lost due to COVID-19, and missed days will not impact the calculation of average daily attendance for state funding. For current information regarding the coronavirus' impact on our state's schools, please visit [dese.mo.gov](http://dese.mo.gov). As always, the best source for up-to-date school closures is your local school district website.

## **WATCH OUT FOR SCAMS AND PRICE-GOUGING**

Times of crisis often bring out the worst in people. Federal prosecutors have announced charges against people claiming to have a vaccine for the virus. Watch out for scams and be vigilant about any information that does not come from a known, credible source. If you witness price gouging or suspect a scam, please contact the Missouri Attorney General's Office at 1-800-392-8222 or online at [www.ago.mo.gov](http://www.ago.mo.gov).

## **WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER**

We are facing something unlike anything we've seen in generations. The impact of the COVID-19 virus extends not just to our health, but to the economic well-being of families and our communities. There are many challenges ahead and each of us bears an obligation to help our neighbors. The most important thing we can do is follow guidelines to maintain social distancing and proper hygiene and take the necessary steps to keep from transmitting the coronavirus to other people.

Despite this uncertain and stressful time, we can look to positive things happening in our community. For me, it was news this weekend that a group of teens from Platte Woods United Methodist Church, right here in our community, returned home safely from Guatemala. The calls for their return reached all the way to the president, and yesterday, the group returned home, despite COVID-19 travel restrictions.

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 situation.