



April 22, 2020

The total number of reported COVID-19 cases continues to climb in Missouri, though at a much slower rate. As I prepare this update, the [Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services](#) (DHSS) reports 6,137 confirmed cases of the coronavirus and 208 deaths in the state. The Platte County Health Department reports 59 positive COVID-19 tests in the county, 32 of which are within Kansas City. DHSS reports 35 confirmed cases in Buchanan County.

We appear to have seen the worst of COVID-19. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation estimates Missouri reached its coronavirus peak on April 14. This estimate is confirmed each day as the governor and DHSS report fewer new cases and deaths.

### **PLANS FOR REOPENING**

As the numbers continue to improve, we can look toward relaxed social distancing rules and a phased return to work. The governor announced a “Show Me Strong” recovery plan designed to safely and gradually reopen the state’s economy. The governor’s plan envisions expanded testing, increased reserves of personal protective equipment and careful monitoring to ensure the virus does not reemerge. Missouri’s recovery plan is similar to the [Opening America](#) plan announced by the president. The phased-in timeline proposed by the White House Coronavirus Task Force is dependent on local conditions, especially regarding infection rates, hospital capacity and testing resources.

### **CURRENT STATUS OF STAY-AT-HOME ORDERS**

The statewide stay-at-home order issued by DHSS has been extended **through May 3**. A similar order in St. Joseph is set to expire the same day. Stay-home orders issued by Kansas City and the Platte County Health Department remain in effect **until May 15**. However, I believe those orders may be shortened.

To increase surveillance of the virus, the Platte County Health Department launched a COVID-19 Symptom and Self-Reporting Tool at [www.plattecountyhealthdept.com](http://www.plattecountyhealthdept.com). County residents experiencing coronavirus symptoms are encouraged to complete the short online questionnaire.

### **MORE HELP ON THE WAY FOR SMALL BUSINESSES**

Many local businesses in need of relief through the Small Business Administration (SBA) lending programs created as part of the CARES Act were distressed when the \$350 billion set aside for the Paycheck Protection Program was exhausted within days. This week, Congress is set to approve increased funding for the program, which provides forgivable loans to cover up to eight weeks of payroll expenses. More than 46,000 Missouri small businesses were approved for PPP loans during the initial phase, including many right here in Northwest Missouri. For more information about this program and other SBA financing options, visit [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov).

### **UPDATE ON UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS**

The CARES Act also provides additional funding for unemployment. The \$600 federal supplement has already started appearing in the payments unemployed Missourians receive. A separate program for self-employed individuals is ramping up. There's been some confusion about the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program. It is new and provides benefits to independent contractors and other workers who normally wouldn't qualify for assistance. Those who qualify to PUA are asked to file for regular unemployment at [www.uinteract.labor.mo.gov](http://www.uinteract.labor.mo.gov). Most self-employed individuals will receive a notice that they do not qualify, as they are not covered under regular unemployment insurance. Employees of the Department of Labor will follow-up once the PUA program is fully implemented.

In my opinion, the unprecedented increase in unemployment claims has overwhelmed the Department of Labor. Individuals attempting to call the division encounter busy signals or long hold times. Last week, I called on the department's director to hire temporary workers—or enlist under-utilized state employees from other departments—to answer phones and process claims. In the meantime, I encourage anyone seeking information about unemployment to refer to the department's website at [www.labor.mo.gov/coronavirus](http://www.labor.mo.gov/coronavirus).

### **HOLDING CHINA ACCOUNTABLE**

Missouri's attorney general has filed a lawsuit against China, alleging that its officials suppressed information about the coronavirus, failed to take measures to stop its spread, silenced whistleblowers and allowed millions of people to be exposed to COVID-19 worldwide. The first-in-the-nation coronavirus suit against China was filed in federal court and notes the negative impacts the virus has had on Missourians and the state's economy. Through the lawsuit, the attorney general is asking for restitution of the losses to the state and its economy as well as damages to punish China's conduct.

## **RETURNING TO THE CAPITOL**

Legislative activity resumes in Jefferson City on April 27. The time has come for us to return to our legislative duties. The 2020 legislative session is scheduled to end on May 15. We have a constitutional deadline to pass a balanced state budget before that date. The state announced that general revenue figures for March 2020 were down 4.2% when compared to last year. I believe this decrease is a sign that the COVID-19 virus is having a devastating impact on our state's budget. Like Missouri families, the state is going to need to tighten its belt to balance our budget in this time of economic uncertainty. We will all need to confront choices we'd rather not make. But I'm confident we will all find a way to pull through this together.

The COVID-19 situation changes rapidly. Please watch my Facebook and Twitter pages for the latest developments. If you have questions or need assistance, please call my office at (573) 751-2183.