



Governor Ralph Northam's Briefing Overview

April 3, 2020

The Governor shared information about the two announcements listed above. Other highlights from today's briefing are below.

COVID-19 numbers in Virginia

- Virginia currently has 2,012 cases, up 500 since the data shared at the last briefing on Wednesday. The number of deaths has increased by five in the past 24 hours to 46.
- The highest number of cases continues to be in the greater Richmond area, northern Virginia and the Peninsula.

Alternative healthcare treatment sites

- Governor Northam announced that the Dulles Expo Center (Northern Virginia), the Richmond Convention Center, and the Hampton Roads Convention Center have been selected as alternative healthcare treatment sites.
- The purpose of these sites is to free up capacity at Virginia's existing healthcare facilities to manage the surge, which is expected during the month of May.
- Next steps include design and construction, which is expected to be complete in six weeks.

Supplies and equipment needs

- Accessing PPE and healthcare equipment continues to be a major focus for the Administration.
- The Governor also shared that they are exploring innovative ways to use the ventilators we have, possibly allowing them to be used to help more than one person at a time.



State budget

- COVID-19 is having a significant negative impact on the Virginia budget, both due to increased costs and reduced revenue. While the federal funding will help, the Governor emphasized that money will not address Virginia's challenges.
- In light of this, the Governor has eliminated all discretionary spending for state agencies, has directed state agencies to prepare for budget cuts beginning in July, is re-evaluating all investments in new initiatives that have been approved in the budget passed by the General Assembly last month, and stated that no new funding commitments are being made at this time.

Recreation at state facilities

- The Governor is in close contact with the [Department for Conservation and Recreation](#) and the [Department of Game and Inland Fisheries](#) regarding the use of public facilities and resources during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- He expressed strong concerns about individuals who are not complying with social distancing guidance. Individuals are directed not to gather in groups of 10 or more and to practice social distancing.
- While he does not want to close these state facilities/resources, the Governor emphasized that it is critically important that individuals comply with the stay at home and social distancing guidance.

National Public Health Week

The Virginia Commissioner of Health shared that next week is National Public Health Week, providing an important reminder to thank and acknowledge public health workers for the critical work they are doing across Virginia.

Religious observances/holidays

Once again, the Governor highlighted that there are a number of religious holidays during the month of April. He encouraged Virginians to comply with the stay at home order and to explore other ways to practice their faith during this difficult time.



Additional requirements

- The Governor was asked if he planned to require all individuals to wear masks while not in their homes. In response, he stated that their focus is on identifying and securing PPE for those who need it most, individuals who are on the front line fighting COVID-19, including healthcare workers and first responders.
- While it is unlawful to cover your face in public in Virginia, the Governor provided assurances that law enforcement would not be enforcing this for those who want to cover their faces with scarves or in other ways.

To watch the Governor's briefing, click [here](#).

Virginia Experiencing Record Job Losses

Virginia logged more jobless claims in the past two weeks than it did for all of 2019. The state reported a record 102,910 jobless claims last week as efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus took a toll on the state's economy, the Virginia Employment Commission reported yesterday. The state's week-over-week claims for jobless benefits soared 14-fold for the period ending March 28 compared with the previous week, when claims surged to 42,592. Jobless claims for the week ending March 7, before the virus hit the state's job market, was 2,054. It had 134,957 initial claims filed for all of last year.

At today's briefing, the Governor shared that this has put a tremendous strain on the system and efforts are being undertaken to address problems for those filing claims. The VEC web site is being upgraded and call center capabilities are being expanded, among other efforts to ensure people are receiving the help they can. He also shared that, through the Department of Labor, those not previously eligible for unemployment will also be able to receive help, including independent contractors, those who are self-employed and those who worked in the "gig economy."



Governor Announces Emergency Funding to Shelter Virginia's Homeless Population

Today, Governor Ralph Northam announced an initial \$2.5 million in emergency funding to shelter Virginia's statewide homeless population during the COVID-19 pandemic. This emergency support will provide temporary housing for the approximately 1,500 Virginians who are currently unsheltered or rely on shelters that require them to leave every day. The funding will also provide housing for individuals in shelters that may need to be quarantined, or where social distancing is not feasible.

Funding will be used for hotel and motel vouchers, case management, food, cleaning supplies, and medical transportation. FEMA will provide partial funding to support individuals experiencing homelessness who are 65 and older, those with other pre-existing conditions, and those who have tested positive for COVID-19. People experiencing homelessness are more likely to have chronic health conditions that go untreated, and are among the populations most vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. In recent years, Virginia has seen an increase in the number of older adults experiencing homelessness.

Virginia's housing support system also relies largely on the use of congregate shelters, which can lack adequate space for social distancing. The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) have provided [guidance to homeless shelters](#) on best practices to safely serve the homeless population during the COVID-19 epidemic. In addition, DHCD is preparing additional housing options for an estimated 10% of the 3,890 Virginians currently in shelters to allow space for social distancing and safe quarantine practices as needed.

The Commonwealth has implemented a number of state and federal protections against housing insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis. The Supreme Court of Virginia has suspended eviction proceedings in all district and circuit courts through April 26, and evictions for all Housing Choice Voucher holders are halted for 120 days. For all mortgages guaranteed by federal mortgage programs, including Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA)



mortgages, the mortgage provider will defer mortgage payments—principal plus interest—for up to three months for those who have lost income due to COVID-19.

At the Governor's briefing today, his Chief of Staff Clark Mercer shared that in the last 24 hours, more than 500 hotels and motels across Virginia have offered more than 37,000 rooms to support those without homes during this time.

For more information, click [here](#).

Virginia Receives Major Disaster Declaration from Federal Government for COVID-19

Virginia Governor Ralph Northam announced yesterday that Virginia has received a Major Disaster Declaration to aid in the Commonwealth's response to COVID-19. This designation provides federal public assistance for all areas in the Commonwealth of Virginia affected by COVID-19 at a federal cost share of 75%. This allows state agencies, local governments, and certain non-profit organizations to purchase additional supplies and receive reimbursements for COVID-19-related costs under its Public Assistance program. In addition, the Major Disaster Declaration authorizes federal agencies to provide direct emergency assistance to Virginia.

To read the full press release about this announcement, click [here](#).