



## Updates from Governor Ralph Northman

April 8, 2020

The following provides highlights from the Governor's COVID-19 briefing today:

### Updated COVID-19 numbers

- Virginia currently has 3,645 positive COVID-19 cases, an increase of 312 within the past 24 hour reporting period.
- Virginia has had 75 COVID-19 deaths, an increase of 12 in the past 24 hours.

### PPE/supplies

- The Governor shared that Virginia continues to obtain PPE and distribute it throughout the Commonwealth, including 1.5 million gloves and 430,000 N95 masks that have been delivered this week.
- While at this time, no Virginia hospital has run out of supplies, there remains a strong focus on preparing to ensure our healthcare providers have the supplies they need as Virginia cases increase.
- Competition between states continues to be an issue but Virginia is preparing for all scenarios.

### Elections

- Virginia has upcoming elections in May (local and special elections) and in June (Congressional primaries across the state).
- Due to concerns about protecting the health of voters and election workers, the Governor is recommending that the May and June elections be delayed.
- He is recommending that the elections planned for May be delayed until the November and that the Congressional primaries scheduled for June 9 be postponed to June 23.
- General Assembly action is necessary to delay the May elections but the Governor currently has the authority to shift the Congressional elections by two weeks.
- The General Assembly is expected to act on the Governor's proposed change to the May election when they convene later this month for the Constitutionally required reconvened or "veto session" on April 22.



- Absentee ballots that have been cast for both the May and June elections will be discarded.

For more information about the Governor's recommendations and action related to the upcoming elections, click [here](#).

### Racial/ethnic data collection

- The Governor acknowledged that in some other states and cities, racial disparities in the impact of COVID-19 have been found.
- He highlighted underlying inequities impacting minority populations, reduced access to healthcare, increased prevalence of underlying health conditions that make African Americans more vulnerable to COVID-19, reduced numbers of minorities who are in jobs where they can telework, and increased number of minorities who reside in urban areas where people are in closer proximity to one another as factors that are important as we prepare and support all our residents in all our communities.
- The Governor has directed VDH to collect and report on racial/ethnic data for all COVID-19 tests performed by the state lab. While Virginia can't require the same of private labs, he shared that they are working with those labs to explore ways to track and report on this demographic data in their testing as well.
- Virginia is among less than 12 states taking this important action to track racial/ethnic COVID-19 data.
- The Health Commissioner shared that Virginia has a health equity work group that is advising on all emergency management related to COVID-19.
- Communications targeting minorities and vulnerable populations has been and will continue to be implemented through the joint information center that has been managing communications related to COVID-19.
- Available data regarding COVID-19 to date is available [here](#).

### Bill review/action

- Following adjournment of the General Assembly in mid-March, the Governor's policy office began reviewing all the legislation passed in preparation for action by the



Governor. For those bills passed by the General Assembly, the Governor may sign, amend or veto each bill.

- The Governor shared that he has already acted on 864 bills passed by the General Assembly.
- The deadline for him to act on the remaining 427 is midnight on Saturday, April 11.
- He acknowledged that changes will need to be made to the budget given the reduced revenues and increased costs associated with COVID-19.
- A question was asked specifically about legislation related to balance billing and COPN reform, which are among the bills with action pending.

#### Relief for Virginia restaurants

- The Governor has directed ABC to defer for 90 days license renewals and related fees due in June for those establishments that have ABC licenses, estimated to effect approximately 6,000 businesses.
- He also announced that those establishments that sell mixed beverages will be authorized to sell them via take-out and delivery.
- The Governor hopes these actions will provide some relief to those restaurants and other entities that have been particularly hard hit by COVID-19.
- For more information about these actions, click [here](#). To access Executive Directive 10, click [here](#).

#### Testing

- The Commissioner of Health confirmed that testing criteria protocol for the state lab prioritizes those who are symptomatic, those who have symptoms with no other identified cause, and those who are 65 or older. He did not know what criteria private labs are using.
- A question was raised re: testing for those who have died due to unnatural causes (i.e., suicide, homicide) and were not tested for COVID-19 prior to his/her death. The Health Commissioner agreed to consider providing tests to medical examiners as testing capacity increases.



### Long-term care facilities

- There was significant discussion about Virginia's efforts to protect those in long-term care facilities.
- The Governor pointed out that the spread of COVID-19 within these facilities demonstrates how easily this virus is transmitted from one person to another.
- It also demonstrates the need for quicker test turn-around times and more widespread testing access.

### Difficulties in filing for unemployment

- The system continues to be strained due to the unprecedented volume of individuals seeking unemployment compensation.
- Chief of Staff to the Governor Clark Mercer shared that the number of people in the state's 211 call center have been increased to try to assist with those filing for unemployment.
- Filing for self-employed individuals seems to be particularly challenging but no expedited process is available for them at this time.

### Requirements for businesses when an employee tests positive for COVID-19

- There have been a few cases where individuals have been infected with COVID-19 from a business that did not share that an employee at that business had tested positive.
- Chief of Staff Mercer directed individuals concerned about the safety of his/her workplace to file a complaint with the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry.
- He recommended employers take common-sense steps when an employee is infected.
- He also shared that it is important that both government and businesses be transparent and proactive in dealing with COVID-19 within a workplace.