

Gov. Pritzker Announces Two-Week Statewide School Closure to Minimize COVID-19 Spread, Additional Economic Measures to Reduce Burden on Illinois Families

Governor Pritzker's Press Office <Gov.Press@illinois.gov>

Fri 3/13/2020 4:17 PM

To: Dec HR News <HRNews@herald-review.com>;



**Office of the Governor
JB Pritzker**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, Mar. 13, 2020

CONTACT

Gov.Press@illinois.gov

Gov. Pritzker Announces Two-Week Statewide School Closure to Minimize COVID-19 Spread, Additional Economic Measures to Reduce Burden on Illinois Families

Chicago — Building on state guidance issued yesterday to promote social distancing and minimize the spread of COVID-19 in our communities, Governor JB Pritzker announced that the state of Illinois will close all schools from March 17 through March 30 and implement additional economic measures to reduce the burden on Illinois families. As of now, day care centers will remain open and will follow strict health and safety guidance.

“All of these choices have cascading effects for citizens and vulnerable populations when it comes to food access, safety, childcare, and social services,” **said Governor JB Pritzker.** “We’ve seen what happens in places that didn’t move with urgency. I ask all of you not to hesitate to do the right thing for your family, your friends, and your community. One small step at a time, we will get through this together.”

“We have seen evidence from influenza outbreaks that community mitigation strategies, such as school closures, have an effect on decreasing the severity of the outbreak,” **said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike.** “By taking these actions now, we hope to slow and limit widespread transmission of this virus, which is essential to ensuring our health care system is not overwhelmed as the disease progresses through our state. School closures will help slow the progression of the virus and we are asking for everyone’s help in reducing the spread.”

“This is an unprecedented event in our lifetime, and we will get through this together,” **said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala.** “Our administrators and educators have shown extraordinary leadership during a time of very difficult decisions. Schools closing will affect each community differently, and I want our teachers, our students, and our families to know that the Illinois State Board of Education is open and is here to help.”

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Following extensive state-level analysis of coronavirus spread in various countries and the social distancing measures that were put in place, the State is taking the precautionary measure of closing all K-12 schools in the state of Illinois from March 17 through March 30. Schools with a spring break that falls outside of this window should move their spring break to within this timeframe.

The Pritzker administration is working to ensure critical support functions remain available to students across the state – including their access to food, child care and safe environments.

Gov. Pritzker has assured school administrators that the state will issue no penalties as a result of this closure. To provide support to school districts across the state, the Illinois State Board of Education will be fully staffed over the coming weekend and during the closure period to work through individualized issues and challenges in each district. An executive order to provide school districts flexibility during this period is forthcoming.

On Thursday, the Illinois State Board of Education was granted a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to continue providing meals to students in non-group settings. Students receiving free and reduce priced breakfasts and lunches will be able to receive grab-and-go meals each day, with some districts having the ability to deliver and others offering parent pick up.

The Department of Children and Family Services is working closely with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and the Illinois Department of Public Health to ensure emergency and preparedness plans are in place to keep youth in care and staff safe. All DCFS group homes will remain open and take extra safety precautions.

ECONOMIC MEASURES

The Governor has also announced new economic measures to reduce the burden on Illinois families.

Gov. Pritzker and Attorney General Raoul have urged the Illinois Commerce Commission to immediately institute a moratorium on shutoffs for all utility companies across Illinois – including energy, telecommunications and water – until the state disaster proclamation has been lifted. The administration is also requesting changes to payment and collection policies to ensure Illinoisans aren’t saddled with utility debt as a result of COVID-19.

The Governor is contacting the leaders of Illinois' utility companies and urging them to maintain services for all Illinoisans, regardless of their ability to pay, during this public health crisis.

The Pritzker administration is working directly with the eight major food banks across Illinois to expand services. The administration is reaching out to food manufacturers to ensure food banks are prioritized and can provide our vulnerable residents the food they need.

Earlier this week, the administration filed emergency rules granting workers who are unemployed due to COVID-19 access to unemployment benefits. The rules provide relief to people who may be restricted in the type of work they can perform due to the outbreak.

AVAILABILITY OF TESTING

The Illinois Department of Public Health is working with state labs and hospital partners to significantly increase testing capability. At this time the administration believes testing can be sufficiently increased to ensure the minimum level of surveillance testing needed to appropriately monitor the spread of the virus.

Gov. Pritzker is continuing to pressure the federal government for more tests to allow the state to deploy full surveillance testing.

HEIGHTENED VIGILANCE FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Vulnerable populations remain a top priority as community spread continues around the state, country and globe. Elderly and immunocompromised residents should take extra caution when attending gatherings of any size and avoid exposure to large groups of people whenever possible. The state has implemented new staffing procedures and strict guidelines restricting visitors at state-operated long-term care facilities and is also working closely with private nursing home and assisted living associations on the adoption of similar guidelines.

Anyone experiencing symptoms should stay home, call their doctor and plan a safe visit for examination. The general public is encouraged to take social distancing practices, including avoiding events of more than 250 people, working from home if possible and maintaining social distance (6 feet) from anyone experiencing symptoms.

The Illinois Department of Public Health has a statewide COVID-19 hotline and website to answer any questions from the public or to report a suspected case: call 1-800-889-3931 or visit [IDPH.illinois.gov](https://www.idph.illinois.gov).

###