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Governor Announces Significant Recommendations & Signs Civil Emergency Proclamation to Respond to COVID-19 in Maine

March 15, 2020

In the wake of several new presumptive positive cases of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Governor Janet Mills announced several new significant recommendations to respond to COVID-19 and [signed a proclamation of civil emergency \(PDF\)](#) to further protect public health. Governor Mills is recommending:

- Ending classroom instruction in all public schools as soon as reasonably practical.
- Postponing all non-urgent medical procedures, elective surgeries, and appointments at hospitals and health care providers across the state until further notice.
- Restricting visitors and all non-essential health care personnel to long-term care facilities except for certain compassionate care situations such as end of life until further notice.
- Postponing all events with 50 or more people all gatherings of more than 10 that include individuals who are at higher risk for severe illness, such as seniors, until further notice.

Governor Mills issued the following statement:

“With several new presumptive positive cases of coronavirus in Maine, it is important that we prepare and respond – but not panic. The Maine CDC has prepared for this eventuality since last year and we are coordinating across government and with communities statewide to respond to this threat. Proclaiming a state of civil emergency unleashes critical state authorities and allows access to federal funds that will support our response efforts to delay and mitigate the outbreak in Maine. These new recommendations will also further protect Maine people.

“Perhaps it is some odd fate that today we also celebrate Maine’s 200th year as a state. Two hundred years ago, we separated ourselves from Massachusetts and embarked on creating our own destiny as a state. We then, as Maine people, learned to be self-reliant and, at the same time, to rely on each other. Today, we are self-reliant and, at the same time, we rely on each other.

“Time and again, Maine people have risen to the challenges put in front of us. We have conquered them because we are a strong, resilient people – borne of the western foothills; the northern potato fields; the bold, rocky coasts; and the tall, pine forests. We have been lifted up by the courage, conviction and resilience that comes from loving a place and its people. Together, we will get through this.”

The Proclamation to Further Protect Public Health signed by Governor Mills today brings the State of Maine to highest alert and allows Governor Mills to deploy all available state resources to protect the health and safety of Maine people and to take every action she reasonably deems necessary to help respond to and protect against the spread of COVID-19 in Maine. It also eases Maine's access to critical federal aid to boost response efforts.

Governor Mills also strongly recommended that:

1. Ending classroom instruction in all public schools as soon as reasonably practical.

The Maine Department of Education has been working closely with school systems in preparation for this step and has secured a waiver from the USDA to allow schools to provide meals offsite to students.

Governor Mills has also directed the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to pursue federal waivers that will help ensure additional child care capacity. Additionally, she has directed Maine DHHS to work with health care organizations on standing up child care centers for their workers along, along with other options to keep front-line workers protecting the public's health and safety.

2. All hospital systems and health care providers across Maine postpone non-urgent medical procedures, elective surgeries, and appointments until further notice.

This will relieve the strain on the health care system as Maine prioritizes COVID-19-related cases.

3. All long-term care providers prohibit all visitors and non-essential health care personnel; except for certain compassionate care situations such as an end of life situation, until further notice.

Recognizing the difficulty of this situation, Governor Mills urges Maine people to find other ways to show older people or those with chronic conditions their love such as by calling them on the phone; writing them, emailing them, using Skype or FaceTime.

4. All events with 50 or more people be postponed and that all gatherings of more than 10 that include individuals who are at higher risk for severe illness, such as seniors, be postponed until further notice.

These recommendations significantly enhance the previous social distancing recommendations offered by Governor Mills. Social distancing is one of the most effective methods to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Governor Janet Mills [has also taken strong steps to protect Maine workers and small businesses](#) impacted by COVID-19. She has requested that the Small Business Administration (SBA) provide economic support loans to Maine small businesses in order to help them overcome any temporary loss of revenue due to COVID-19. She has also submitted emergency legislation, sponsored by Senate President Troy Jackson and House Speaker Sara Gideon, that temporarily expands eligibility for unemployment insurance to individuals whose employment has been impacted by COVID-19.

Governor Mills has also directed the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development to examine additional ways that the State can support Maine's small businesses, including working with the Finance Authority of Maine and other potential lending partners. Her Administration is also working around the clock to prepare emergency legislation and enact a budget that helps response to the issues presented by COVID-19 with the goal on minimizing its impact on Maine people and reducing its spread.

These new steps from the Governor build on the work done by the Mills Administration to prepare for and respond to COVID-19, including:

- [Convening a Coronavirus Response Team](#), led by Maine CDC Director Dr. Nirav Shah and comprised of key individuals in the Mills Administration, to coordinate State government's response across departments and local agencies and health authorities.
- [Declaring a health insurance emergency](#) to require health insurance carriers providing health care coverage in Maine's commercial market to cover costs related to coronavirus testing and increases access to care.
- Directing the Maine Department of Health and Human Services [to issue emergency rules](#) to ensure MaineCare does

not charge copays for office visits and prescription drugs that may be needed for COVID-19 diagnosis and treatment, and to allow for a prescription refill of up to 90 days so people have to make fewer visits to pharmacies.

- Distributing personal protective equipment to first responders and health care professionals across Maine as it becomes available.
- [Temporarily suspending](#) non-essential, out-of-state travel for all State employees and reviewing leave policies and telecommuting options.
- [Applying for and receiving a waiver](#) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to allow schools the ability to provide meals offsite to students, if the school or community currently has, or qualifies for, a USDA Summer Food Service Program.
- Requesting that the Small Business Administration (SBA) provide [economic support loans to Maine small businesses](#) in order to help them overcome any temporary loss of revenue due to COVID-19.
- Submitting emergency legislation, sponsored by Senate President Troy Jackson and House Speaker Sara Gideon, that temporarily [expands eligibility for unemployment insurance](#) to individuals whose employment has been impacted by COVID-19.
- Launching a 211 option for Mainers to get answers to questions about COVID-19 at any time. This service is available by dialing 211 (or 1-866-811-5695), texting your ZIP code to 898-211, or emailing info@211maine.org.

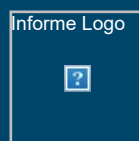
For more information on Maine's response to COVID-19 and updated testing results, visit the Maine CDC [website](#). Additionally, Maine CDC and 211 Maine have launched a new option for Mainers to get answers to questions about COVID-19 at any time. This service is available by dialing 211 (or 1-866-811-5695), texting your ZIP code to 898-211, or emailing info@211maine.org.

The best thing that Maine people can do to protect their health is to take the same preventive measures that avoid catching a cold:

- Wash your hands often for 20 seconds.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Stay home if you are sick.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, shortness of breath, and lower respiratory distress. Call ahead to a health care professional if you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness. Health care providers will make the initial determination on whether COVID-19 testing is advisable. As appropriate, health providers will take samples and submit them to Maine CDC.

Credit

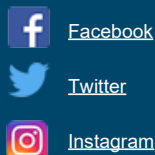


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