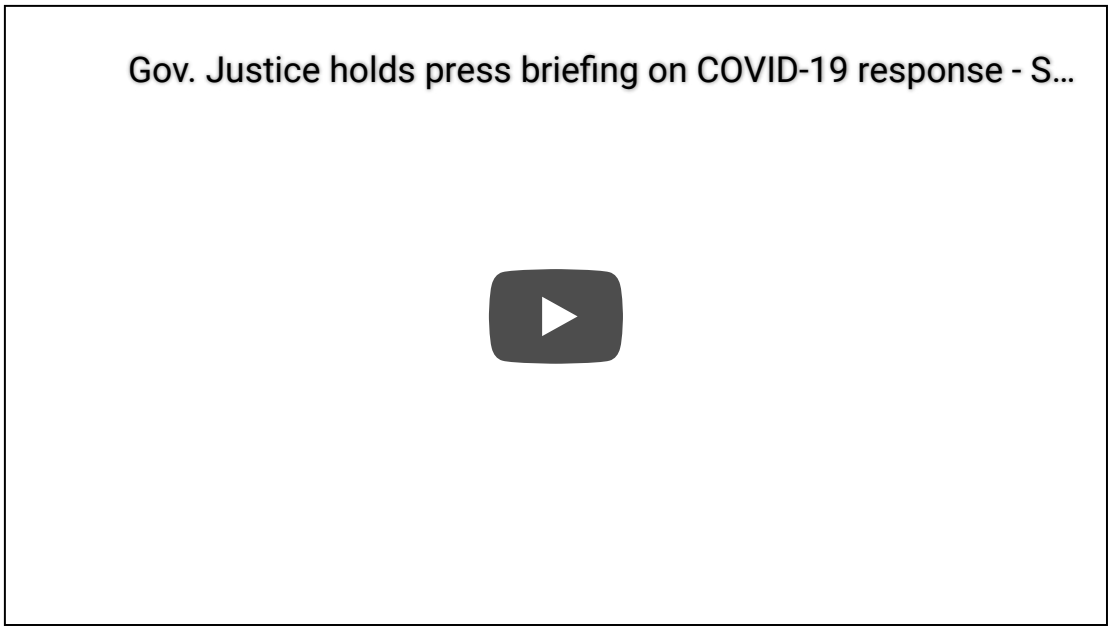
COVID-19 UPDATE: Gov. Justice discusses first day of school; announces nearly 850 Kids Connect WiFi locations online

9/8/2020



CHARLESTON, WV – Gov. Jim Justice joined West Virginia health leaders and other officials today for his latest daily press briefing regarding the State's COVID-19 response.

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL IN WEST VIRGINIA

During his briefing on Tuesday – the first day of classes for Pre-Kindergarten-12 students across West Virginia – Gov. Justice took time to thank everyone who has played a role in getting the state's education system back up and running.

"Today is a really, really important day," Gov. Justice said. "I can't thank our teachers and service personnel enough – all those that are making this happen – from our superintendents, principals, state board, everyone.

"It's been 179 days that our kids have been without their teachers and out of the classroom," Gov. Justice said. "Our kids need to have the opportunity to be back in school and our parents need the choice to have our kids back in school."

(https://www.flickr.com/photos/govjustice/albums/72157715896972107)

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Schools in 46 of the state's 55 counties were permitted to resume in-person instruction Tuesday, with the remaining nine counties beginning the 2020-21 academic year on a fully-remote basis.

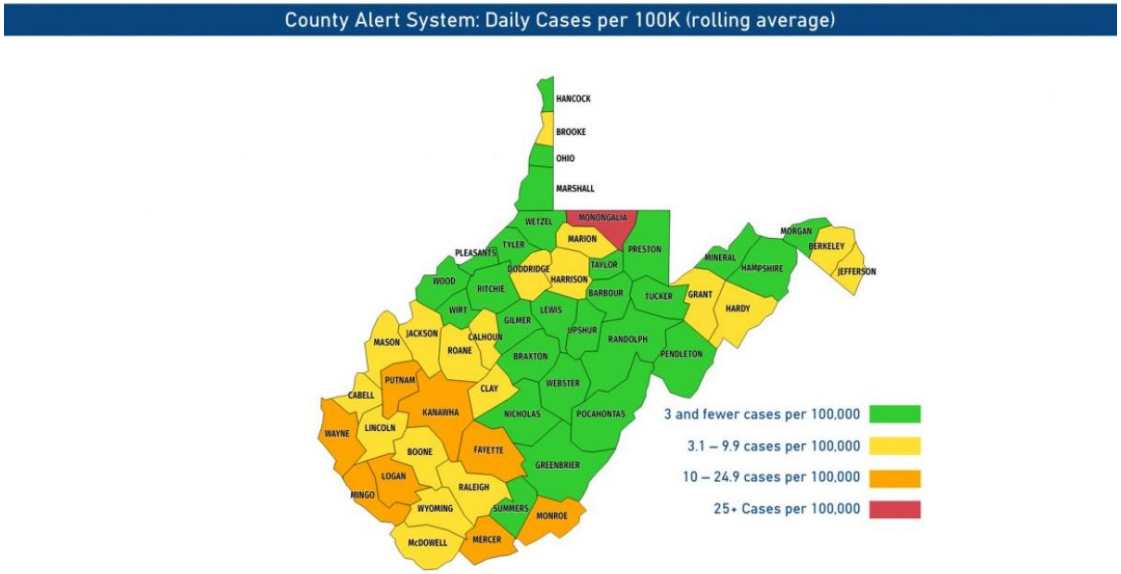
"We celebrated, today, 46 counties that were able to open up in-person," State Superintendent of Schools Clayton Burch said. "Our service personnel and teachers have been working to make this day happen. We've said from the beginning that our children need to be in school, nobody argues that point, our students really need our teachers and our parents have been very vocal about wanting to be in-person."

This past Saturday at 9 p.m, the West Virginia Department of Education released this week's color-coded **School Re-Entry Map update** (https://wvde.us/school-reentry-metrics-protocols/). State health leaders who make up the COVID-19 Data Review Panel verified the data to ensure the map was a true indication of the safety level in each county.

As of Saturday, Sept. 5, 2020, a total of 27 counties were green, while 19 counties were yellow.

Eight counties were orange: Fayette, Kanawha, Logan, Mercer, Mingo, Monroe, Putnam, and Wayne counties.

One county was red: Monongalia County.



(https://wvde.us/school-reentry-metrics-protocols/)

Counties in green or yellow were permitted to resume in-person classes Tuesday. Those in orange and red resumed instruction remotely. These counties must reach green or yellow status to resume in-person instruction. **Click here to read more** (https://wvde.us/school-reentry-metrics-protocols/) about the protocols that go into effect for each color status.

"I want our kids back in school and I'm trying, with all in me, to achieve just exactly that," Gov. Justice said. "But, at the same time, we have to follow the science and the numbers. We don't want to go back to school and then look back and realize that it terribly compounded the issue.

"I am hopeful that in our red and orange counties, their situations will very quickly get down into the yellow and then green and then we can go on and move forward in a really safe and prudent way," Gov. Justice continued.

Superintendent Burch added that, regardless of the mode of instruction, all students across the state who need meals have access to them.

"We said the meals would be served, regardless of whether students were in-person or virtual," Superintendent Burch said. "And, in the nine counties that couldn't start in-person, knowing that meals are being delivered to those children was very, very important to us. I'm proud to report that our buses were delivering meals in those counties."

NEARLY 850 KIDS CONNECT WIFI LOCATIONS UP AND RUNNING

Also on Tuesday, Gov. Justice announced that 848 free WiFi access locations have now been activated across the state through the Governor's Kids Connect initiative.

Kids Connect is a joint effort between the Governor's Office of Technology, the WVDE, and the Higher Education Policy Commission to establish over 1,000 free wireless internet access points at Pre-K-12 schools, libraries, higher education facilities, National Guard armories, and State Parks in all 55 counties statewide to ensure that every West Virginia student who needs internet access to complete remote work is able to do so.

"I want to take time to send out a special thanks to the Office of Technology and the Department of Education because these people worked right through the Labor Day weekend, connecting the sites in record time," Gov. Justice said. "We're going to have over 1,000 of these sites very soon. We're working to push them across the finish line right now."

COVID-19 CASE NUMBERS UPDATE

Additionally Tuesday, Gov. Justice reported that West Virginia's **statewide rate of COVID-19 transmission** (https://rt.live/) – also known as Rt – remained at 1.28, the worst such rate in the country. The Governor added that West Virginia's number of active cases has reached a new record high of 2,784.

Still, West Virginia's COVID-19 numbers have been among the best in the nation. West Virginia has outperformed the national average, as well as the rates of all of its bordering states, in percentage of population tested, percentage of population positive, and percentage of positive test results. West Virginia has also outperformed the national average in case fatality rate.

Click here to view the latest COVID-19 data (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx)

OUTBREAK REPORT

Also on Tuesday, Gov. Justice announced that school-related COVID-19 outbreaks have been identified within 11 facilities in five counties across the state.

These outbreaks have been identified in Brooke County at Brooke Middle School and Brooke Intermediate North; Kanawha County at Ben Franklin Career and Technical Center, Cedar Grove Middle School, Chamberlain Elementary School, Horace Mann Middle School, Shoals Elementary School, and Sissonville High School; Lincoln County at Duval PK-8 School; Mason County at Point Pleasant Primary School; and Mingo County at Mingo Central High School.

Meanwhile, the Governor added that a new church-related outbreak of COVID-19 has been identified in Kanawha County. Other church-related outbreaks remain active in Cabell, Monroe, Wayne, and Wyoming counties at this time.

There are now 34 outbreaks in long-term care facilities across the state, down from 35 on Friday.

Within corrections facilities, Mount Olive Correctional Complex in Fayette County did not see any new cases of COVID-19 over the weekend. Their number of active cases remains at 134.

Meanwhile, South Central Regional Jail in Kanawha County and Western Regional Jail in Cabell County each have one active case among their inmate populations.

Across the entire DCR system, a total of 37 employees have active cases at this time.

Click here to view the latest corrections facility update (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/Correctional-Facilities.aspx)

WEST VIRGINIA REMAINS AMONG NATIONAL LEADERS IN CENSUS RESPONSE RATE; ALL URGED TO PARTICIPATE

Once more today, Gov. Justice asked all West Virginians to participate in the 2020 United States Census.

West Virginia currently boasts the 2nd-best U.S. Census response rate in the country.

To date, 97.1 percent of West Virginians have been counted. For perspective, during the last Census in 2010, the state's final response rate was just 74 percent.

West Virginians are able to complete the Census until Sept. 30, 2020.

Every West Virginian who does not respond to the Census represents a loss of $20,000 in federal funds over the next 10 years for the state and its local communities. The funds can go toward things like healthcare, education, infrastructure, school lunch programs, and more.

Be counted in minutes: **2020census.gov** (https://2020census.gov/).

(https://2020census.gov/)

SMALL BUSINESS GRANTS: OVER $12 MILLION HAS NOW BEEN AWARDED

Also today, Gov. Justice provided an update on small businesses that have applied for funding through the Governor's **West Virginia CARES Act Small Business Grant Program** (https://grants.wv.gov/en/flexible-page?pageId=1424), reporting that over 3,400 applications have been submitted, with more than $12 million being awarded to date.

The initiative is providing $150 million of West Virginia's CARES Act funding to qualifying businesses across the state. Any West Virginia-based small business, in existence on March 1, 2020, with 1-35 employees, is able to apply for up to $5,000 in grant funding.

Gov. Justice has also opened up the West Virginia CARES Act Small Business Grant Program to sole proprietorships and self-employed individuals in West Virginia.

Any sole proprietor or self-employed person, in operation on or before March 1, 2020, is now able to apply for up to $2,000 in grant funding.

Businesses planning to apply must first be registered as a vendor with the State to be eligible. Guidelines for the grants and instructions on how to apply are available at **Grants.wv.gov** (https://governor.us15.list-manage.com/track/click?u=d525ab9ade4d860d2b5772468&id=1343b63b56&e=5c140b96bc).

The application will remain open until Sept. 30, 2020.

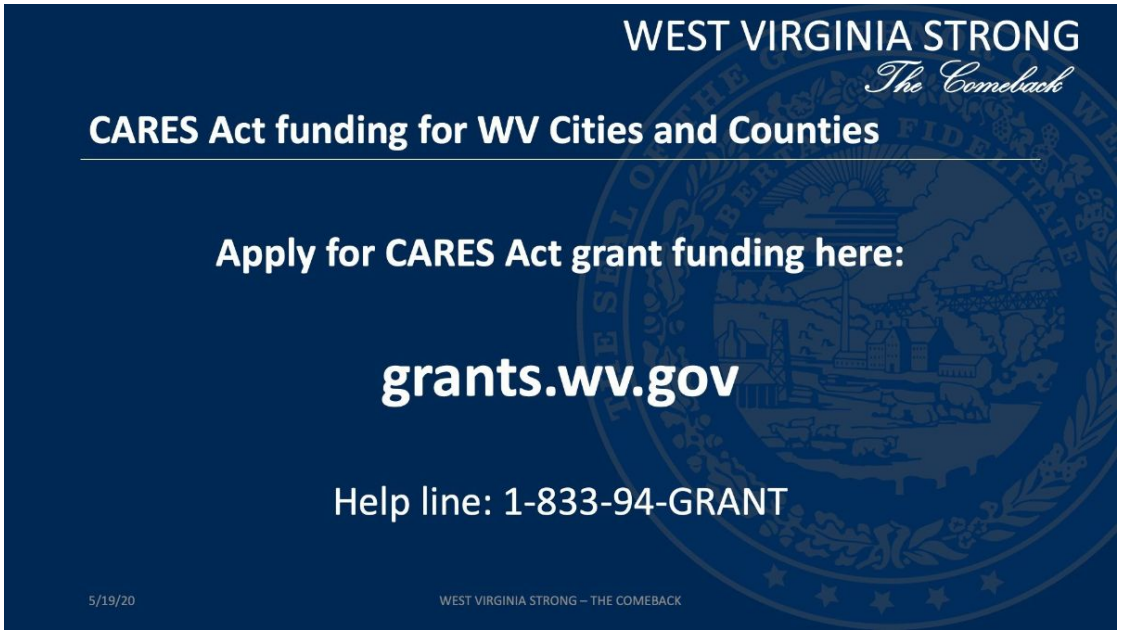
(https://grants.wv.gov/en/flexible-page?pageId=1424)

CITIES/COUNTIES GRANT FUNDING: $104 MILLION HAS NOW BEEN AWARDED

Also today, Gov. Justice provided an update on cities and counties throughout West Virginia applying for funds through the federal CARES Act, reporting that more than $104 million has now been awarded all across the state.

A new web portal is now available for city and county government officials to apply for this grant funding, at **grants.wv.gov** (https://grants.wv.gov/en). Interested parties can also call the helpline: **1-833-94-GRANT**.

Each of the recipients of CARES Act funding, along with grant amounts, are now available to view through the **COVID-19 transparency web portal** (https://stories.opengov.com/westvirginia/published/mnOzKr2wB) provided by West Virginia State Auditor's Office.



(https://grants.wv.gov/en)

FREE COVID-19 TESTING

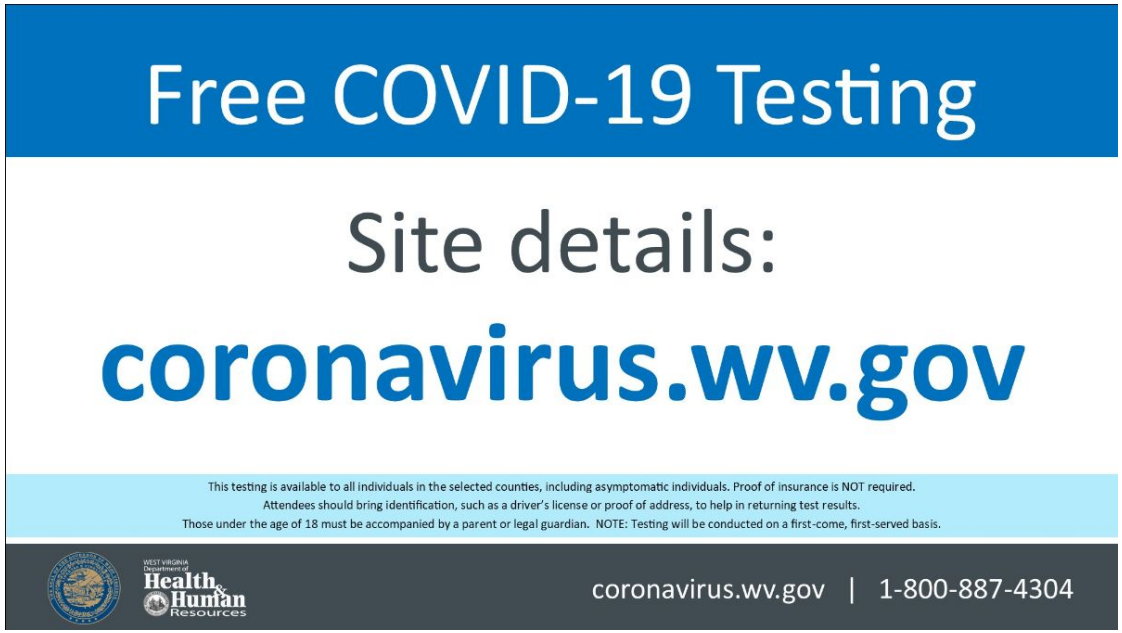
Gov. Justice also updated the schedule of upcoming free community COVID-19 testing events taking place over the next several weeks at various dates and times in multiple counties across the state.

The effort is part of a plan to provide free optional testing to all residents in several counties that are experiencing higher rates of COVID-19 transmission. It targets residents who have struggled to be seen by a physician or do not have insurance to pay for testing. However, other residents, including those who are asymptomatic are welcome to be tested.

Counties with upcoming free testing events include:

- Cabell County
- Doddridge County
- Jackson County
- Kanawha County
- Logan County
- Mason County
- Mercer County
- Mingo County
- Morgan County
- Nicholas County
- Raleigh County
- Wayne County

Click here to view dates and additional details (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/pages/testing.aspx)



(https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/pages/testing.aspx)

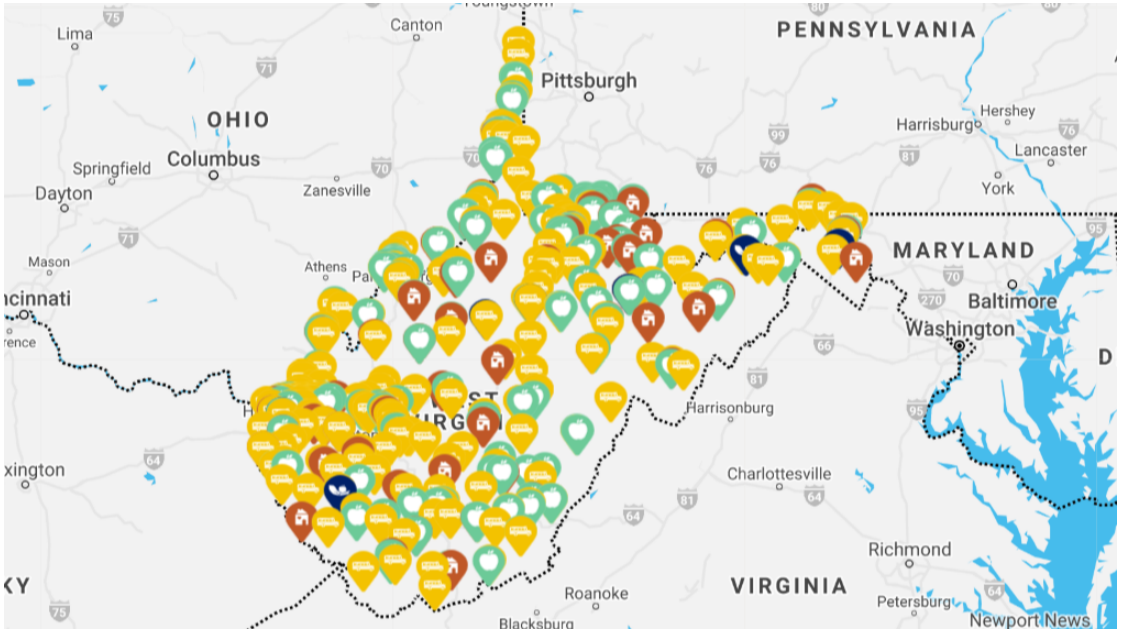
WEST VIRGINIA STRONG FOOD ASSISTANCE MAP

Also, Gov. Justice reminded West Virginians that an interactive free-feeding location map, designed to help connect citizens in need to food resources across the state, is available online.

Click here to view the map (/summerfeeding/Pages/default.aspx)

More than 696 free-feeding locations have now been made available through a multi-agency effort between the West Virginia National Guard, the West Virginia Department of Education, the West Virginia Bureau of Senior Services, the West Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (WV VOAD), and the United Way.

If food distribution locations aren't available in some communities, individuals are encouraged to call 211 for further assistance.



(/summerfeeding/Pages/default.aspx)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Click here to view all Executive Orders and other actions (https://governor.us15.list-manage.com/track/click?u=d525ab9ade4d860d2b5772468&id=3029d4fcc4&e=5c140b96bc) taken by Gov. Justice to combat the spread of COVID-19 in West Virginia.

For more information about COVID-19 prevention and more, call the State's toll-free hotline at **1-800-887-4304** or visit **Coronavirus.wv.gov** (https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx).

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