

Vice President Mike Pence praises 3M on coronavirus tour

The vice president's trip to 3M was part of a cross-country tour in his role leading the White House Coronavirus Task Force.

By **Stephen Montemayor** (<https://www.startribune.com/stephen-montemayor/298000161/>) Star Tribune

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Vice President Mike Pence, arriving Thursday at the 3M Innovation Center in Maplewood, described an “all hands on deck effort” to combat the spread of coronavirus, which has alarmed health officials around the world.

Pence expressed confidence about the availability of coronavirus test kits but acknowledged, “We don’t have enough tests today to meet what we anticipate will be the demand going forward.”

“For those who we believe have been exposed, for those who are showing symptoms, we’ve been able to provide the testing,” he added. “But as more Americans take an interest in this or have concerns about this, we want to make sure they have access to a coronavirus test as well, and we’ve made real progress on that in the last several days.”

The vice president’s trip to 3M was part of a cross-country tour in his role leading the White House Coronavirus Task Force. He was met by 3M CEO Mike Roman, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and other government and industry officials. 3M is a maker of the N95 respirator, a type of face mask used as personal protective equipment against airborne particles.

Pence credited 3M for going to full production level for respiratory masks as the virus started spreading in January. “You are playing a vital role in the health of our nation,” he said. He added that the risk for the average American “remains low” and recounted steps the administration has taken, including travel restrictions and quarantines.

He offered condolences for the 11 U.S. deaths to date but said “the good news is that the vast majority of those who contracted the coronavirus in our country” have gotten treatment and are recovering.

Pence was next scheduled to head to Washington state to speak with officials about the coronavirus. That trip forced him to cancel a campaign event later Thursday in St. Paul with Second Lady Karen Pence.

The vice president’s visit came as Minnesota lawmakers have been holding hearings on the state’s response to a potential regional outbreak of COVID-19, the illness the coronavirus causes. The Minnesota Health Department has asked the Legislature for \$25 million in emergency funding in response to the virus, which has spread around the globe from China.

Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm said Thursday that Minnesota’s public health laboratory can conduct tests and has been doing so since Monday. But she added that the state does not yet have the capacity to test everyone who wants to be tested. As Pence departed 3M, he reached out for a handshake with Malcolm, who instead offered an elbow bump to avoid spreading germs.

In Congress, the Senate approved an \$8.3 billion emergency spending bill Thursday to combat the new virus, a day after the bill passed the House.

At 3M, Walz used the vice president’s visit to underscore the multilayered approach to confronting the virus.

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■ Video (01:49) : The vice president's remarks came after a meeting with 3M CEO Mike Roman and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz at the



GLEN STUBBE

■ Gallery: Vice President Mike Pence visits 3M

“The vice president being here speaks to that, of understanding that governors and state public health officials are going to be the ones that are going to have to be administering back so that collaboration is happening,” Walz said.

Although stores have seen a run on face masks in recent weeks, health officials warn that they are intended for health care professionals caring for sick patients and generally not effective in preventing the public from catching coronavirus.

Addressing the “average American,” Pence said unless people are ill, they have no reason to buy a mask. That will mean more are available for patients and health care workers, he added.

“The reality is that despite that we now have cases ... the risk to the average healthy American of contracting coronavirus remains low,” Pence said. There will be more cases, he added, but said it seemed to be affecting older populations, noting increased inspections of nursing homes.

“At the president’s direction we’re going to continue to lean into this,” he told reporters.

Accompanying Pence were Stephen Hahn, commissioner for the Food and Drug Administration, Dr. Deborah Birx, White House coronavirus coordinator, and Malcolm. The 3M executives meeting with Pence were Mojdeh Poul, executive vice president for the Health Care Business Group, Michael Vale, executive vice president of the Safety and Industrial Business Group, Denise Rutherford, senior vice president for corporate affairs and Omar Vargas, vice president for global government affairs.

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