



## **Governor Kemp Provides COVID-19 Update to Mayors**

Tuesday afternoon, Governor Brian Kemp held an update call with the mayors of Georgia's Hub Cities and the Metro Atlanta Mayors. GEMA Director Homer Bryson and Dr. Kathleen E. Toomey, M.P.H., commissioner of the Georgia Department of Public Health, were also on the call. Please find the updates from the call below:

Governor Kemp declared a Public Health State of Emergency for Georgia on Saturday, and the Georgia General Assembly ratified that declaration on Monday with bipartisan support. The Public Health State of Emergency will give the state the tools to tackle this issue head on.

Governor Kemp now has the authority to activate up to 2,000 Georgia National Guard troops to active duty to address issues related to coronavirus (COVID-19). The state is currently using the Georgia National Guard sparingly for small missions such as transporting medical equipment and security at quarantine facilities related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As of midday Tuesday, Georgia has 146 positive COVID-19 cases in 27 counties.

On Monday, the state received a shipment from the strategic national stockpile. The state also has supplies on order from private sectors vendors, including over 100,000 masks, 10,000 pallets of medical face shields, 10,000 gloves, 25,000 gowns, 26,000 shoe-covers and 1,000 goggles.

### **Key Points:**

- **Testing:** The state is now establishing independent test sites in each region of the state. There are 18 health districts around the state, which should have at least one test site in each region in a matter of days or a week. Federally qualified health centers are establishing drive-thru or tents for COVID-19 testing at their sites. They are using the vendor LabCorp. The Governor shared that the metro Atlanta area's Grady Health System will have testing capabilities starting today (March 18), with the capability to test approximately 40 cases a day.
- **Remind Constituents:** Governor Kemp urged mayors to remind constituents to practice social distancing and proper handwashing, avoid large events, stay home if sick, use hand sanitizers and to be especially protective of the elderly and chronically ill. He also encouraged city officials to continue supporting local businesses and residents in the community.
- **School Closures:** In conversations with the Georgia Association of State Educational Leaders and with Georgia's state school superintendents, Kemp made the call to close all public schools, K-12 and post-secondary schools from March 18-March 31. They are all moving to online instruction. The state is committed to working with

school superintendents and other educational leaders on the timeframe of school closures and extended school closings, if necessary due to the coronavirus. The University system and the Technical College System are moving to online courses until the end of the semester except for students who need an in-person experience. State School Superintendent Richard Woods has suspended milestone testing until the end of the school year and has also suspended the attendance requirement until the end of the school year.

- **Isolation Facilities:** The state is currently maintaining isolation facilities at Hard Labor Creek State Park with seven trailers in a remote area of the park. One patient that was isolated there has returned home, fully recovered and believed to have returned to work. There is one new patient onsite and the rest of the trailers are currently vacant. The facility is well secured and isolated, so there is no risk to the local community. The state is close to opening another the isolation facility in Forsyth, Monroe County at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC). That space should be up and running, if the weather holds, by the end of this week. Twenty isolation trailers are planned for the area.
- **Price Gouging:** Attorney General Chris Carr is seeing cases of price gouging, mainly around food and water. The AG is also receiving information about private testing sites that are charging up to \$300 per test. Governor Kemp urges city officials to get the word out in their respective communities for those in need of testing to call their doctor first and get the best advice before visiting a healthcare facility for the test. He also urged that citizens contact their local health department or dial the coronavirus hotline (below). *City officials who know of price gouging in their communities should contact the AG's office.*
- **Teleworking:** Governor Kemp noted that many governments, including the state government, as well as the city of Atlanta have fully

implemented telework policies where practical, and he encourages others to do the same.

- **Small Business Administration Loans:** Georgia is the first state in the Southeast to submit a letter for the Small Business Administration loans. That process is underway and the state expects to be notified soon. The U.S. Small Business Administration Administrator Jovita Carranza issued revised criteria for states or territories seeking an economic injury declaration related COVID-19. The relaxed criteria will have two immediate impacts:
  - **Faster, Easier Qualification Process for States Seeking SBA Disaster Assistance.** Historically, the SBA has required that any state or territory impacted by disaster provide documentation certifying that at least five small businesses have suffered substantial economic injury as a result of a disaster, with at least one business located in each declared county/parish. Under the just-released, revised criteria, states or territories are only required to certify that at least five small businesses within the state/territory have suffered substantial economic injury, regardless of where those businesses are located.
  - **Expanded, Statewide Access to SBA Disaster Assistance Loans for Small Businesses.** SBA disaster assistance loans are typically only available to small businesses within counties identified as disaster areas by a Governor. Under the revised criteria issued today, disaster assistance loans will be available statewide following an economic injury declaration. This will apply to current and future disaster assistance declarations related to coronavirus.

## **Q&A Portion of the Call:**

**Mayors: How can cities help?**

Governor Kemp: First thing you can get people to do is not believe rumors. We are being very thoughtful about everything that we are putting out. We are communicating with people about our actions, getting feedback from a lot of different people. We have to make decisive, well-thought-out and decisive decisions at this point. Anything you all can do to tamp down a rumor and get back with our staff to figure out exactly what is going on will help us a lot.

We are getting bombarded with questions and ideas. We want those questions and we want those ideas. Funnel those through your [leadership at GMA](#) and let them work with [Ian Caraway](#). It will help us be more efficient and get you the answers quicker. Obviously if you have an emergency and a dire situation and you do not have time to go through that protocol, reach out to Ian directly. There is also a shortage of blood. There are safe ways for individuals to give blood. [Contact the Red Cross](#) for more information.

**Mayors: Please clarify the city's role on what it can and cannot do at this time. Who has the authority to close non-essential businesses and restaurants?**

Governor Kemp: I ask you to continue to support your local small businesses. Not only support, but continue to work with your local small businesses. As an example, we ordered from The Varsity for lunch today. A lot of decisions that are being made at a local level will have a big impact. Some of those decisions will cause local business to go out of business and create economic turmoil. There is no state directive at this time on restaurant closings and curfews. I know that is a tough decision for us policymakers, but I would ask you to be very thoughtful in that regard.

**Mayors: Please provide clarity on holding council meetings electronically during an emergency, as this relates to the Open Records Act. Will you relax the Open Meetings requirements during this emergency crisis?**

Governor Kemp: We cannot give you legal advice. You need to consult with your local attorney. I believe the AG's office has put out some guidelines. They are also not your attorney. I know that is frustrating for some. That is something you have to work with them on, and I am sure the AG will be willing to work with that with you. [Click here](#) for guidelines for local governments regarding the COVID-19.

**Mayors: Are there plans to activate the state emergency communication system or communicate to residents via the emergency broadcast system?**

GEMA Director Homer Bryson: If there was an incident that we felt was necessary to do so we would. We have not at this time.

**Mayors: When will testing begin, and at what level and where? How many tests will be conducted? How will test kits be prioritized? Are there plans to prioritize testing for first responders?**

Dr. Kathleen E. Toomey, M.P.H.: We are beginning testing in communities across the state. All of our health districts are involved and we are actively engaged with every single one of our health directors to stand up at least one and in some cases multiple testing sites. These are in addition to the testing going on in some hospitals and some primary care offices and other locations. *Let your constituents know we don't invite individuals to go to emergency rooms or to primary care offices without calling ahead. We are trying to avoid emergency rooms being flooded by individuals with concerns.*

We are working very closely with our federal partners and our guidance is very clear. We cannot test everybody who is mildly ill. The majority of cases, virtually

80 percent of cases, have very mild symptoms and can be monitored safely at home without additional testing. However, those who are most ill or working in the community should be prioritized. These priorities are set by our federal partners. Among the top tier are healthcare workers, doctors, nurses, aides, and first responders. Priority testing should also be for the elderly (the public health definition of elderly is 60 or older) and those with chronic health conditions. Nursing home residents, senior citizens--those are individuals we are trying to identify early and test early so we can try to prevent any potential spread. In the early days, every time we identified a potential case, we performed aggressive contact investigations. Now with the numbers of cases increasing, we are doing community-based social distancing.

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## **GMA's Coronavirus Reference Page**

As GMA receives pertinent resources surrounding COVID-19, we will update the "[Coronavirus Resources for Municipal Leaders](#)" page on our website at [www.gacities.com](http://www.gacities.com). As we receive breaking updates, we will communicate those to you with great urgency.

[Visit GMA's COVID-19 Resource Page](#)

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## **Coronavirus Hotline**

**1-844-442-2681**

## **Contact GMA**

GMA is here to help you! Please send all of your emails to [gacities@gacities.com](mailto:gacities@gacities.com). We are regularly checking this email box.