



2020 Legislative Session Update April 17, 2020

Executive Orders

Throughout the week, Governor Walz issued numerous Executive Orders related to COVID-19:

- **Executive Order 20-34:** Protecting Minnesota's First Responders by Directing the Commissioner of Health to Share Information with the Department of Public Safety, 911 Dispatchers, and First Responders
 - This permits the release of limited health data (e.g. address) from the Commissioner of Health to the Department of Public Safety to control and prevent the spread of COVID-19, specifically for first responders.
- **Executive Order 20-35:** Extending the COVID-19 Peacetime Emergency Declared in Executive Order 20-01
 - This extends the peacetime emergency to May 13, 2020, unless it is rescinded by proper authority, or until it is terminated by a majority vote of each house of the Legislature, whichever is earlier. It allows this peacetime emergency to be further extended.
- **Executive Order 20-36:** Directing Salary Reductions for Certain Officials
 - Reduces the salaries of the Governor, Chief of Staff, and Cabinet Members by 10% between April 15, 2020 and December 31, 2020.
- **Executive Order 20-37:** Extending the Relief from Regulations for Motor Carriers and Drivers Operating in Minnesota Declared in Executive Order 20-06
 - Temporarily suspends weight-related regulatory provisions to allow vehicles to transport supplies. Also prohibits carriers from allowing sick or fatigued individuals to operate commercial vehicles.
- **Executive Order 20-38:** Allowing for Safe Outdoor Recreation
 - Allows some recreation facilities to re-open including golf courses, bait shops, marinas, etc. under social distancing protocols. Other outdoor recreational activities that were previously discouraged can also resume as of 5am Saturday. The order will specify that there must be at least 6 feet of separation between participants in different households but continues to prohibit other activities that do not allow for social distancing including marathons, fishing contests, spectator events, fairs, etc. Indoor facilities associated with outdoor recreation areas must remain closed with a few exceptions.
 - Continues to require those Minnesotans who can work from home, to do so.

See all of Gov. Walz's Executive Orders issued in response to COVID-19 [here](#) or [here](#).

State-Level Legislative Action

Early in the week, conversations continued around the impacts COVID-19 will have on our immediate and future state budgets. Early in session, it was projected that the state would see a more than \$1 billion surplus. News early in the week showed that projected General Fund revenues for February and March were \$103 million below the forecast. National economic growth is also projected to go down by 5.4% during the calendar year. Conversation continues to grow around the increasing need to open business in Minnesota again. Governor Walz has stressed the importance of doing this safely, with social distancing in mind. Various state agencies have begun working together, at the request of the governor, to create plans for safe reopening of business. Learn more [here](#).

This week, an insulin bill was passed by both the House and Senate and signed by the governor. Under the bill, if someone has less than a 7-day supply of insulin, they would pay no more than \$35 to get a 30-day supply from a pharmacy. Manufacturers would reimburse the pharmacy for the cost of insulin and there would be no income eligibility requirements. For the long-term, the bill requires manufacturers to offer a 90-day supply for no more than \$50 for those with a family income below 400% of the federal poverty guidelines. Fines were also established for those manufacturers that don't comply. Learn more [here](#).

On Monday, the Senate held a COVID-19 working group. The group discussed legislative needs in various areas including HHS, transportation, and judiciary. For HHS, there was discussion of the need for temporary waivers to allow the MDH Commissioner more authority, COVID-19 testing of uninsured individuals, and telemedicine. During the hearing, Carlton County HHS Director Dave Lee testified on the need for more investment in technology for telemedicine, specifically citing a need for \$2 million to expand the DHS/MNIT telepresence system.

On Tuesday, the House and Senate passed another sweeping COVID-19 bill, [HF 4556](#). This bill included various provisions dealing with licensing, human services, and more. See a summary of the bill [here](#). Of interest to local public health, the bill included the following provisions:

- Gives the MDH commissioner significant powers during the peacetime emergency including allowing the addition of licensed hospital and nursing home beds without going through the moratorium exception process and setting up alternative care sites.
- Provides free testing for uninsured individuals through MA and coverage for the associated visit.
- Allows MDH significant authority to grant blanket waivers on programs under MDH's jurisdiction except for health and safety requirements.
- Allows MA to pay for care in temporary hospital facilities.
- Makes various changes to telemedicine policy, specifically stating that mental health care providers and respiratory therapists can provide services via telemedicine; allows for visits via telephone; and prohibits health carriers from denying or limiting coverage based solely on a visit being completed via telemedicine.
- Provides \$1.25 million for this year, to reimburse Second Harvest Heartland for the purchase of milk and protein products, including meat, dry legumes, cheese, and eggs.

Learn more about the bill [here](#).

This week, Governor Walz extended his peacetime emergency for an additional month. Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 12, gives the governor the authority to declare a peacetime emergency due to a public health emergency. Gov. Tim Walz declared the first COVID-19 related peacetime emergency on March 13, 2020. The governor announced that he will [extend the initial emergency order through May 13, 2020](#). This order is distinct from the Stay at Home order, which still ends on May 4. The order remains in effect for the days stated by the governor unless the Legislature acts to terminate the statewide emergency declaration with a majority vote in both bodies or the governor issues a further extension. Although there was debate on ending the emergency in both the House and the Senate this week, due to the split Legislature, it is expected that the extension will stand, and the state will continue to be under a peacetime emergency order until May 13.

On Thursday, the House HHS Finance Committee held a hearing on COVID-19 with a presentation from MDH and Mayo Clinic on testing. You can see the presentation [here](#) and read an article about the presentation [here](#). The House Early Childhood Finance and Policy Division also had a presentation about the impacts of COVID-19 on childcare. You can see that [here](#). You can read an article with more information about COVID-19 and the impact on childcare [here](#).

The Senate also met on Thursday and the House on Friday to discuss various bills, some related to COVID-19 and others not. One of note is [SF 4489](#) which will allow restaurants to sell sealed beer or wine to customers during the closure of restaurants. Learn more about the bill [here](#).

Also on Thursday, the Governor [announced a regional partnership between Midwest states](#) to re-open the economy. Other states involved include Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky. These states will work closely to coordinate to reopen business through a scientific and data-driven process that protects workers' health.

Friday Press Conference with Governor Walz

During the governor's Friday press briefing, he announced his most recent Executive Order. Commissioner Malcolm also spoke, mentioning the work of local public health. Highlights from the press conference include:

- The state is launching a homemade mask drive. Governor Walz acknowledged they are not n95s but can prevent individuals from getting others sick. On Saturday, April 25th, the state is asking people to drop masks off to their local fire stations. This way the state can help get them to people who need them.
- Our mental health providers are open, and they are taking a lot of calls. The state has launched a mental health page on the state's COVID-19 site (www.mn.gov/covid19) which will include links to tools and contact information for help. They are also encouraging people in need to text "MN" 741741 or call **CRISIS (**274747).
- COVID-19 is hitting communities of color disparately. The unemployment rate for people of color is more than double for that of white Minnesotans. The state has formed a community resilience and recovery workgroup to include those who face disparities in selecting solutions. More information on this work is also on the state's COVID-19 page.
- Dr. John Hicks, medical director at Hennepin Healthcare, discussed surge preparedness. He provided additional information about the planning process for gathering supplies. There continues to be scarcity in PPE and other supplies. The state has begun to find and source new options for protective supplies and equipment. They are hoping these will arrive in time for a surge of patients.
- Mary Turner, the President of the Minnesota Nurses Association provided more detail about the impact of COVID-19 on nurses and patients, highlighting the devastation faced by patients.

ACTION ALERT! - Your legislators are still working. Please continue reaching out to your representatives to share information about how your local agency and community is responding to COVID-19 and any challenges you are facing. [Find who represents you and reach out to them.](#)

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