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COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Gov. Beshear, Health Care Professionals Taking Steps to Protect Vulnerable Populations from COVID-19**

*State long-term care facilities urged to restrict visitors; Pharmacy access executive order issued*

**FRANKFORT, Ky. (March 10, 2020)** – State public health officials and senior care leaders joined Governor Andy Beshear at the Capitol on Tuesday to talk about Kentucky’s latest cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and to talk about the ongoing preparedness and response, including strong actions to protect the state’s most vulnerable populations.

“We are responding aggressively and ask Kentuckians to partner with us in reducing the risk to themselves, their loved ones and especially to those at higher risk including those over 60 and with chronic health conditions including heart, lung or kidney disease,” said **Gov. Beshear**.

“People need to remain calm, but take the simple and necessary steps to protect themselves and their communities, including practicing good hygiene.”

Gov. Beshear [directed](#) the state nursing homes and other long-term care facilities to stop taking visitors.

Six people in Kentucky have tested positive for COVID-19 as of 9 a.m. Tuesday with three people from Harrison County, two from Fayette and one from Jefferson. All of the individuals are in isolation. Gov. Beshear shared the locations of the latest positive cases on Monday within an hour of receiving the results.

Of the three Harrison cases, one is a female, 27, and the others are males, ages 67 and 68. The Fayette County cases are both males, ages 46 and 49. The patient in Jefferson County is a 69-year-old male.

There is a link between all three Harrison County cases, although the linkage cannot be disclosed at this time. The link is not the initial patient's employment at the Walmart located at 805 US-27 S in Cynthiana. Gov. Beshear said there is no reason for people to avoid the Cynthiana Walmart.

As of Tuesday morning, the state has received results for 34 tests with 28 of those being negative.

"I'm confident, as a state and as a nation, we're going to rise to the challenge," said **Dr. Steven Stack**, Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) commissioner. "I want you to know there's a lot of people working hard on your behalf."

### **Pharmacies**

Gov. Beshear has taken further action by signing [an executive order](#) to allow pharmacies to refill prescriptions for up to 30 days to ensure those vulnerable communities or those who need to self-isolate will have their needed prescriptions. His action will also allow, if necessary, pharmacies to operate at locations other than those designated on their permits to make sure people have access to necessary medication. This will allow providers to operate mobile pharmacies to reach homebound seniors and others in need.

### **Protecting our seniors**

Gov. Beshear and Eric Friedlander, acting secretary of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), said state nursing and long-term care facilities will restrict visitation and strongly urged all senior care and long-term care facilities to restrict visitation to protect the most vulnerable populations. In an executive order [communicated](#) from CHFS to facility operators, Gov. Beshear recommends long-term care facilities limit visitation to only those with loved ones that are receiving end-of-life care.

"As we have seen in Seattle, where this virus truly causes massive harm is in facilities with our seniors, especially fragile seniors," said Gov. Beshear. "And I understand that there are Kentuckians out there who worry they might not be able to see their loved ones. I get that. But right now we are making sure we are protecting the life, health and safety of individuals in those facilities."

"As the Governor said, this is a very difficult decision for us to make, but it is the right decision to make," **Friedlander** said. "This is one that protects those people in our long-term care facilities. It is important that we do this."

The Governor said he knows people are concerned about their loved ones and said those with concerns should call the CHFS inspector general at 502.564.2888.

On Monday, Gov. Beshear told those 60 and over to avoid flying and not to take cruises.

Gov. Beshear said there will be some disruption to people's daily lives, but the goal is to protect Kentuckians.

"We all are working together," said **Tim Veno** of Leading Age Kentucky. "We take this emerging threat very seriously and are taking the necessary precautions including restricting visitation, advising our employees not to come to work if you are ill, being flexible with our leave time. Now, we are used to dealing with emerging threats...and we are well equipped to deal with this emerging threat."

“The Kentucky Medical Association is working in collaboration with the excellent efforts of the administration, the cabinet and Office of Public Health to make sure we deliver clear and concise information to our physicians, the patients they serve and the public at large,” said **Dr. Brent Wright**, president of the Kentucky Medical Association. “Now is not a time to panic or promote fear, now is the time to join together in an effort to protect ourselves, our communities and our state so that we achieve a successful outcome in addressing the COVID-19 virus.”

“All our hospitals work very diligently to plan for disasters and emergencies so we are well prepared,” said **Nancy Galvagni** of the Kentucky Hospital Association. “We have dedicated staff at our association in emergency preparedness and infection prevention.... I just want to assure everyone the hospitals are preparing for this and they are ready to provide quality care to their patients.”

“I want to thank Gov. Beshear and his leadership, Dr. Stack and Adam Mather with the Office of the Inspector General,” said **Betsy Johnson**, President of the Kentucky Association of Health Care Facilities. “We look forward to continuing collaborations.”

Gov. Beshear implored businesses to allow employees to tele-commute and provide paid sick leave to sick employees hoping to stop them from coming to work and exposing others. He announced state government is adjusting its sick leave policy to ensure state employees who are sick can stay home – even for new employees who have not accrued leave time. He said the state would make sure those who are sick can stay home and will be covered.

## **Testing**

The state has had access to ample tests and has tested as many as 14 people in a day. Gov. Beshear said the testing will continue to accelerate and more people will be tested as more private labs come on line. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines and clinician judgement determine who is tested.

Gov. Beshear and Dr. Stack said the state would have all of the tests needed. The CDC has also made all of the kits Kentucky needs available and commercial labs have started testing. The state lab in Frankfort has been conducting COVID-19 testing since March 2. The Department for Public Health has the ability to process results in a timely manner. Specimens received at the lab by noon each day will be resulted on the same day. Specimens received after noon will be resulted the following day. Currently, Kentuckians can seek testing by consulting with their health care provider.

While people are understandably concerned about the coronavirus, Gov. Beshear said there have been more than 22,500 cases of the flu in Kentucky with 85 deaths, including four children. He urged people to practice good hygiene to reduce the risk of being exposed and spreading the viruses to others.

## **Prepared**

“I am working all day every day to make sure we are fully prepared for any contingency,” said Gov. Beshear. “I can tell you your state government, local governments and health departments are doing a great job and are doing everything we can to be prepared no matter what this throws at us.”

Gov. Beshear has taken decisive action to prepare and respond to COVID-19. On Friday, immediately after confirmation of the first case, Gov. Beshear declared a [state of emergency](#) to ensure the state has every resource available to respond. On Saturday, he issued an [executive order to prohibit price gouging](#). On Monday, the Governor [issued an executive order](#) to waive copays, deductibles, cost-sharing and diagnostic testing fees for private insurance and state employees. The Governor is also telling providers to expand their network to patients that may go outside their normal providers.

The State Health Operations Center is activated at level one – fully activated – and the State Emergency Operations Center is also activated.

### **More information**

People can find regular updates and resources including more information about when to seek medical attention and course of action for those in counties with positive cases at [kycovid19.ky.gov](http://kycovid19.ky.gov). They are also urged to visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://cdc.gov/coronavirus) for up-to-date information. Kentuckians who want advice can call the state hotline at 1.800.722.5725 or call their local health care provider.