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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gov. Beshear Recommends Public, Private Schools Ceasing In-Person Classes in Response to COVID-19

Two new positive tests in Fayette, Jefferson counties

FRANKFORT, Ky. (March 12, 2020) – Gov. Andy Beshear recommended that all school superintendents consider ceasing in-person classes for an extended period of time beginning Monday, March 16, to help control the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in communities across Kentucky.

“With advice from Dr. Steven Stack and others, this coming Monday, we are recommending that Kentucky’s public and private schools cease in-person classes for at least the next two weeks,” said Gov. Beshear. “This is a big and necessary step and announcing it gives our superintendents, teachers and parents the time to prepare. It is important for children to go to school tomorrow so they can get the resources they need for the next couple of weeks.”

Gov. Beshear said while children seem to be relatively safe from the virus, they are able to spread it and we are taking the steps necessary to protect all Kentuckians.

As of March 12 at 5 p.m. ET, Gov. Beshear indicated that Kentucky had two new positive tests, one confirmed positive from Fayette County and a presumptive positive from Jefferson County. Both are believed to be isolated, one at home and one at a hospital. Twenty-seven cases were tested today, but not all results were back by the 5 p.m. news conference. Gov. Beshear said the Commonwealth also now has three labs running tests, which include LabCorp, University of Louisville and the state lab.

As of 2:30 p.m. ET Thursday, three public school districts already were closed – Harrison County, Owen County and Danville Independent – and another two had announced they were closing Friday. Two more school districts, plus the Kentucky School for the Blind and Kentucky School for the Deaf, had announced they would be closing Monday.

While the planned time of re-opening the districts has varied slightly, most districts have announced April 13 as their planned first day back for students.

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Interim Education Commissioner Kevin C. Brown said he strongly supports Gov. Beshear's recommendation that all schools close beginning Monday, March 16, in order to prevent community spread of COVID-19.

"I want to thank the Governor, Dr. Stack and others in the administration that have been working tirelessly over the past few days to ensure that we take a proactive approach to this issue based on science and research," Brown said.

School districts may choose to utilize the Kentucky Department of Education's Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI) Program for these days if they have been approved to do so by KDE. NTI instruction is an option and is not required. However, those using NTI will not have that day count as a day that must be made-up at the end of the year. Non-NTI districts may also choose to provide online or hard copy enrichment activities even if not providing NTI instruction.

“I am asking the Kentucky Board of Education to consider a blanket statewide waiver for all districts to utilize NTI instruction even if those districts were not approved prior to this school year,” Brown said. “So far this week, dozens of districts have submitted applications and requests for a waiver to utilize NTI instruction if closed as a result of COVID-19.”

Brown also said, on Monday, he asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture to grant a waiver to Kentucky to permit school districts to provide non-congregate feeding during school closures. If granted by USDA, this will enable districts to be reimbursed for meals that they choose to serve to students on school closure days.

Tomorrow, Brown will convene the Leadership Team at KDE all day to provide direct consultation to superintendents and other education partners with questions about school operations affected by COVID-19. KDE will be developing a public Q & A document related to these operational issues.

Channeling the Governor’s advice to the Commonwealth over the past few weeks, Brown said he will continue to remind our K-12 education community to follow the 3 C’s: Stay calm, you are leaders within your communities, be clean, practice and promote hand-washing, and cooperate, continue working with your local health department partners and other local leaders.

Kentucky has approximately 650,000 public school students who attend classes in 1,466 schools (172 school districts).

Thursday, Dr. Steven Stack, commissioner for the Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH), showed infection data from the counties around Seattle to explain why Kentucky is taking aggressive steps.

“If we reduce our social contact with each other by about 25% the infection line drops dramatically,” Dr. Stack said. “And if we do not contact each other at all you don’t have an epidemic.”

Gov. Beshear, Dr. Stack, Kentucky Department of Education Interim Commission Kevin Brown and Eric Friedlander, acting secretary of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, [briefed Kentuckians](#) at the Capitol on Thursday evening on the latest developments and the response of state and local government.

Beginning weeks before the virus was found in the Commonwealth, state and local officials collaborated to prepare for COVID-19 and are now working together to respond.

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.

Tuesday, Gov. Beshear announced strong actions to [protect the state's most vulnerable populations](#) by limiting visitation to senior care and long-term care facilities. Gov. Beshear also signed 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.

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

More information

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention encourages people to follow these [steps to prevent illness](#). 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](#). They are also urged to visit [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.

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