

Governor calls conference for COVID-19 developments

Written by Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Monday, 16 March 2020 17:08

New cases, school closures, precautionary measures

As the growing concerns mount over the spread of COVID-19, or coronavirus, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham called a press conference on March 13 to address a number of relevant topics.

“We want to continue to raise the level of awareness [of the virus] because in doing so, we are able to manage this crisis in a prepared, non-panicked environment,” Lujan Grisham said.

NEW CASES

The conference opened with the announcement of four more confirmed COVID-19 cases across New Mexico. The new cases include:

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A Bernalillo County man in his mid-50s with household contact with a previous presumptive positive resident. He is at home in isolation.

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A Bernalillo County man in his 80s with household contact with a previous presumptive positive resident. He is hospitalized.

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A Bernalillo County woman in her mid-70s with household contact with a previous presumptive positive resident. She is at home in isolation.

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A Santa Fe County woman in her late 20s with recent travel to New York. She is at home in isolation.

This brings the current total of confirmed cases for New Mexico up to 10, as of March 13.

While the New Mexico Public Health Department works to combat the current number of confirmed cases, they along with the governor are urging people to do the following:

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Stay home from work or school if you are sick.

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□ Avoid all non-essential travel to affected out-of-state areas and exercise extreme caution with all out-of-state travel.

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□ Remain home, or self-isolate, if you are sick and call the Department of Health at 1-855-600-3453 if you are exhibiting any of the symptoms of COVID-19. Those symptoms include fever, cough or trouble breathing.

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Continue taking precautionary steps to protect your health and the health of others, such as:

- Washing your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Clean “high-touch” surfaces daily with regular household cleaners
- Avoid sharing personal household items

The measure of closing schools and telling people to avoid large public gatherings and unnecessary travel has become part of a strategy known as “flattening the curve.”

This means the spike and peak of confirmed cases will be smaller because people will have been told to self-isolate at home and reduce the chances of either contracting the virus or spreading it to others.

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SCHOOL CLOSURES

Following an order issued on March 12, Lujan Grisham reaffirmed March 13 that all New Mexico K-12 public schools will close for three weeks, effective March 16.

The governor said closing schools is part of the plan to reduce risk of further spreading.

“New Mexico has no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our schools, but closing schools proactively has been shown to be one of the most powerful non-pharmaceutical interventions we can deploy,” Lujan Grisham said.

Schools will not be required to make up the missed instructional days at the end of the academic year, the Public Education Secretary Ryan Stewart said.

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While schools will be closed, Stewart said the Public Education Department has requested and expects to receive waivers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to allow school meal programs to continue.

School kitchen staff will be on the job, preparing meals for pickup at school cafeterias and other sites for New Mexico families that depend on school meals.

USDA will reimburse the full cost of breakfasts and lunches for schools where 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, which covers nearly all New Mexico schools.

Stewart also said New Mexico school employees will be paid as if there was not a closure.

“As we’re caring for families and students, making sure we’re keeping employees safe and paid is critical,” he said.

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Lujan Grisham asks New Mexicans to be careful and clear about how they can do their part to reduce the dangers of COVID-19.

“Be prepared, work with us to do everything we can to minimize impact,” she said.

