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BREAKING

TOP STORY

Bullock orders school closure, limits on nursing home facilities

By Freddy Monares Chronicle Staff Writer

Mar 15, 2020



Montana Gov. Steve Bullock on Thursday announced an executive order declaring a state of emergency in Montana in response to the coronavirus.

THOM BRIDGE, Independent Record

Montana Gov. Steve Bullock directed the closure of public K-12 schools for two weeks starting Monday and announced a set of directives meant to slow the spread of coronavirus, including limiting visitation to nursing home facilities.

Bullock said in a news release on Sunday that it's his top priority to protect the health and safety of Montanans at a time when the state faces the potential for extraordinary health risks from coronavirus. "Social distancing" is one of the most important protective measures to "flatten the curve" of this virus, he said.

"I cannot underscore the seriousness of following these measures to help our neighbors, friends and families," Bullock said.

On Friday, Bullock announced the first four cases of coronavirus in Montana, including a Gallatin County man in his 40s who is recovering at home. Two more people have tested positive for the virus since.

During the schools' two-week closure, Bullock said, officials will plan to provide free meals to students who need them, pursuant to a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He said the schools would also plan for "all other matters and services that students need in the event of future or ongoing closure."

Bullock said schools will continue to receive state-funding during that time. He said state and school officials will evaluate and consider next steps as needed, and that the closure was not in response to an outbreak in schools.

The order does not apply to private schools.

Bullock ordered that visitation in nursing homes be suspended with an exception for compassionate care situations. People who are exempt from this order will be screened to see if they've traveled in the last two weeks, live where community spread of the virus is happening, or if they have symptoms consistent with the coronavirus.

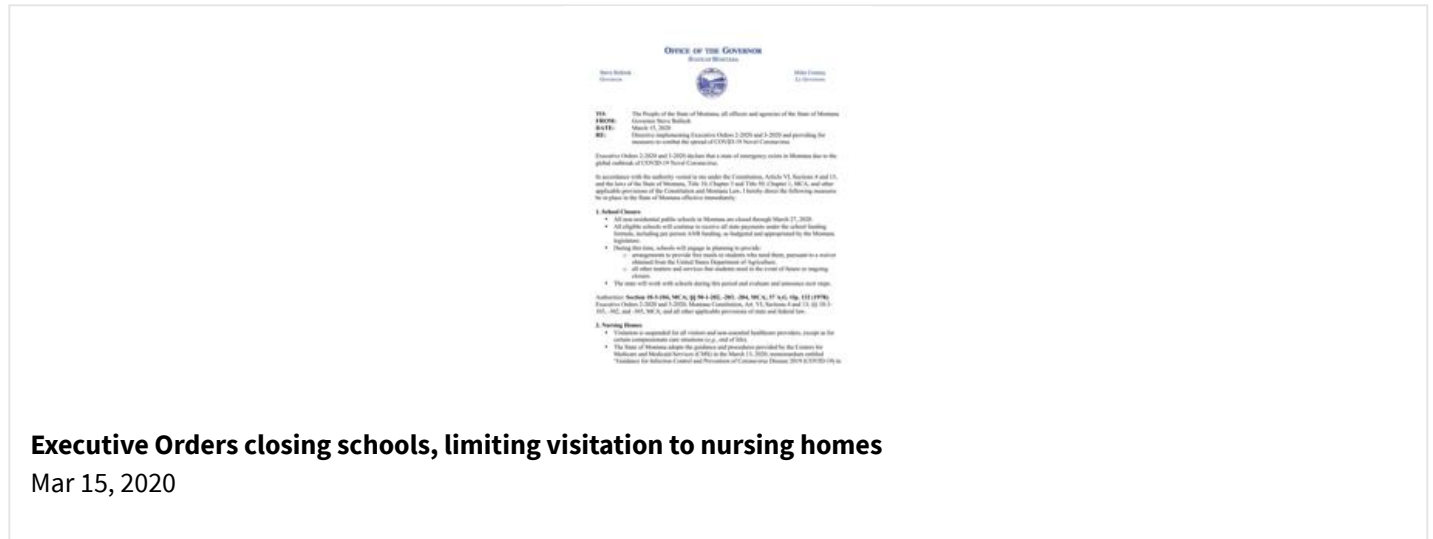
Bullock also recommended that parents avoid, if possible, having grandparents over 60 or those who are immunocompromised take care of children.

In the release, Bullock also strongly recommended that people limit all gatherings, especially those with more than 50 people. He encouraged people over the age of 60 or who are immunocompromised or have chronic health conditions to not participate in gatherings with more than 20 people.

Bullock has consulted with doctors, school leaders and other public health officials to help prevent the spread of the virus, the release said. He said he understands this decision will disrupt Montanans over the coming weeks, and that he’s committed to work with groups to minimize the impact.

“I encourage businesses to do everything they can to support families as well,” Bullock said.

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Crime and Courts

Freddy Monares covers crime and courts for the Bozeman Daily Chronicle.