

Nebraska State and Legislative Actions:

Governor Update

Gov. Ricketts began his press conference reminding Nebraskans who are returning to the state from areas of the country with large numbers of coronavirus cases to self-quarantine for 14 days. He then thanked President Donald Trump on his leadership in extending the social distancing guidelines until April 30. Gov. Ricketts clarified that counties under directive health measures past April 30 would abide by the directive health measures in lieu of the United States' guidelines. There are currently 18 Nebraska counties under directive health measures. Finally, Gov. Ricketts warned of another tough month ahead for Nebraska with a forecasted peak in cases in mid to late April. He encouraged everyone to do their part by following social distancing guidelines.

Unemployment

John Albin, the Nebraska Commissioner of Labor, announced that there are six new unemployment benefits in the CARES Act recently passed by Congress. Albin said they are still waiting for guidance on short-term assistance, and that checks would not be available this week due to testing and software installation. He said nearly 45 staff members worked over the weekend to install the necessary software in order to carry out CARES Act benefits. Albin encouraged those who think they might be eligible to apply, and that most people will be eligible for benefits of some kind, except for those able to telework from home or continue working normally. Benefits mentioned by Albin include:

- Short-time compensation
- Pandemic Unemployment Assistance for self-employed workers (can receive between \$174 and \$440 per week plus another \$600 payment)
- Reimbursement of 50% of trust fund for nonprofit or government workers
- \$600 payment on top of unemployment claims with no additional application needed
- Waive waiting period
- Extra 13 weeks of unemployment benefits, now 39 weeks instead of 26.

Takeout Tuesday

In efforts to support our local restaurants that have been negatively impacted by COVID-19, Gov. Ricketts declared Tuesdays in April as "Takeout Tuesday." He urged Nebraskans to consider ordering takeout from one of their local restaurants on Tuesdays throughout April, or whenever possible, in order to keep restaurants in businesses.

Q&A

It was asked if Nebraska has been able to get needed medical equipment such as beds, ventilators, and PPE. Between hospitals acquiring some of their own supplies, and the state aiding when possible, Nebraska is in the process of building an inventory, Gov. Ricketts said. When asked about testing, Gov. Ricketts invited Chief Medical Officer Dr. Gary Anthonie up to discuss testing efforts in Nebraska. Dr. Anthonie said that over 2,500 tests had been conducted in Nebraska, around 5% have come back positive for COVID-19. He also said that Nebraska could soon be receiving rapid tests.

WIC

Due to the spread of COVID-19, most Nebraska Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) offices are closed to the public. Recently, the United States Department of Agriculture temporarily loosened regulations that guide the delivery of WIC services in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Those who utilize WIC or are interested in applying can receive help over the phone, including applying for assistance. For more information please see the [press release](#) issued by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Telehealth

On Friday, Dr. Bill McDonnell, medical director for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska, announced the insurance provider would begin covering telehealth visits at the same level as regular office visits amid the coronavirus pandemic.¹ McDonnell cited the change as an action to protect patients and providers, while making care more accessible. He also said it will help doctors and other health care providers keep their offices open throughout the pandemic, as people are leaving their homes less. The policy is currently slated to be in effect through the end of June 2020.

Federal:

Extended Guidelines

On Sunday afternoon, President Donald Trump announced that the social distancing guidelines implemented 15 days ago would be extended through the end of April.² Last week, President Trump expressed hopes of lifting some social distancing guidelines in time for Easter. However, during a Sunday press conference, Dr. Anthony Fauci announced that 100,000 to 200,000 Americans could likely die from coronavirus in the coming months—solidifying the need for continued precautionary measures.

Stimulus Possibilities

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has begun compiling priorities for Congress's next round of stimulus legislation.³ Items such as safety protections for workers, free treatment for COVID-19, and increasing state aid are being considered. On a call Monday, Pelosi expressed worry that the supply chain for PPE is stretched thin, and that the shortages may not be completely alleviated by the \$2 trillion CARES Act. Pelosi also would like to see another round of direct cash payments to individuals, increased SNAP benefits, expanded family leave for those caring for COVID-19 patients, and direct assistance to states hit hard by the virus like New York.

¹ https://www.omaha.com/livewellnebraska/blue-cross-changes-policy-to-encourage-use-of-telehealth-during/article_79416e0d-c09e-5d5e-a744-9f8a74f01e28.html

² <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/30/822448199/how-15-days-became-45-trump-extends-guidelines-to-slow-coronavirus>

³ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-30/pelosi-says-next-stimulus-needs-more-aid-for-states-workers>