

Nebraska State and Legislative Actions:

Governor Update

Gov. Pete Ricketts began his Tuesday press conference with the announcement that Webster, Adams, Nuckolls, and Clay Counties have been placed under a directive health measure. Gov. Ricketts said that as of today, Nebraska has 170 confirmed COVID-19 cases. He also announced that he is crafting an executive order to allow critical access hospitals to have more beds. Normally, CAHs are limited to 25 beds and 96-hour stays. Gov. Ricketts also touched on the topic of nursing homes, as four nursing homes have residents who have tested positive for COVID-19. He said all nursing home staff should use surgical masks, and that the state is currently working to obtain more.

Elders

Gov. Ricketts was joined by Nebraska Health Care Association CEO Heath Boddy, as well as Todd Studdebdieck of AARP Nebraska. Studdebdieck said AARP has been working with its members to get them information on COVID-19, citing their website. He also reminded Nebraskans returning home from other states or countries to self-quarantine in order to protect our elders. Gov. Ricketts also encouraged Nebraskans to check in on elderly loved ones and offer to help them with anything they may need.

Reminders and Q&A

Ricketts wrapped up his conference with reminding Nebraskans to not quit their jobs as they won't be eligible for unemployment benefits if they voluntarily quit. He also reminded Nebraskans that his executive order pertaining to evictions does not exempt renters from paying their rent, it just encourages landlords to not seek eviction during the pandemic.

Ricketts was asked why directive health measures haven't been applied to the entire state, and he responded that Nebraska is trying to do a more tailored approach and to only implement those restrictions if it's absolutely necessary. Ricketts cited many will grow tired and may ignore restrictions, so he prefers to only implement DHMs when, and if, necessary. Ricketts was also asked if rural areas will see their peaks later than the urban areas. He expects that peak cases will in fact occur at different times across the state.

SNAP

On Monday, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services announced it will launch a pilot program for online purchasing and delivery of groceries purchased through benefits received from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, beginning on April 1.¹ As of right now Amazon and Walmart are the only qualified retailers that will be able to handle SNAP purchases online in Nebraska.

"A natural response to getting groceries, while also practicing social distancing and self-quarantining, is to order online and get groceries delivered," CFS Director Stephanie Beasley said. "Before, Nebraskans who relied on EBT to get their groceries had no option but to go to a brick and mortar store. Now they can help flatten the curve and order groceries delivered from home.

¹ <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/SNAP-Online-Purchasing-Pilot-to-Launch-April-1st.aspx>

Federal:

Direct Payments

On Sunday, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin announced that Americans could expect to see their direct payments from the CARES Act direct deposited into their account within 3 weeks. ² On “Face the Nation,” Mnuchin said there will be a web-based application for those who don't receive direct deposit to give the IRS the necessary information.

However, some say it could take longer to receive the payments, considering in 2001 it took six weeks for the IRS to start sending out rebate checks under a new tax cut, and in 2008 it took three months after a stimulus package was signed into law. However, many Americans have begun filing their taxes electronically, giving the IRS their bank information. It's said those Americans will likely see their money sooner.

Stimulus Bill

In an interview with the New York Times, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi revealed she would like to see a full rollback of the limit on the state and local tax deduction, or SALT, in the next stimulus package. ³ Pelosi said this would provide a quick cash infusion in the form of increased tax rebates to an estimated 13 million American households — nearly all of which earn at least \$100,000 a year. She said the next stimulus package should include a measure to get money to more Americans. Republicans enacted SALT in their 2017 tax law. It's a limit that bars households from deducting more than \$10,000 a year from their yearly tax bill in states with high state and local tax rates like California and New York. Pelosi said the change could be made for people who filed their 2018 and 2019 taxes, allowing them to get more money back from the federal government.

² <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/29/politics/treasury-secretary-steve-mnuchin-stimulus-checks/index.html>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/business/economy/coronavirus-economic-stimulus-taxes.html>