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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gov. Beshear Provides Update on COVID-19

Visit the Governor's [Facebook](#) page to watch today's news conference

FRANKFORT, Ky. (June 24, 2020) – Gov. Andy Beshear on Wednesday updated Kentuckians on the state's actions to fight the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19).

"We are going to get through this because we have shown, even with a worldwide health pandemic, we can come together, unite, know what it takes, and manage something as aggressive and deadly as COVID-19," the Governor said. "The only way we can reopen safely is if we continue to test and people work with our contact tracers."

Gov. Beshear and administration officials offered new guidance for Kentucky schools looking to open safely in the fall, new sites for in-person unemployment insurance claims service and new drive-through testing locations as part of the commonwealth's partnership with Kroger. Information was also provided about a major settlement that will provide millions of dollars to Kentucky's rural hospitals and major announcements aimed at making Kentucky's Appalachian region the AgriTech center of America.

Case Information

As of 4 p.m. June 24, Gov. Beshear said there were at least 14,363 coronavirus cases in Kentucky, 229 of which were newly reported Wednesday.

Dr. Steven Stack, Kentucky's commissioner for public health, warned that health officials have tied many cases to travel outside of the state.

"We have now identified here in Kentucky numerous people that have returned from Myrtle Beach with COVID-19," Dr. Stack said. "I have to continue to urge and beg folks to be careful. It is not the time to be cavalier because we have a scenario where a place that was just starting the reopening process went from being fine to a state of emergency in three weeks."

Unfortunately, Gov. Beshear reported one new death Wednesday, raising the total to 538 Kentuckians lost to the virus.

The death reported Wednesday was an 89-year-old man from Laurel County.

"It sounds when we say, 'Only one death,' like it is a good day, but it's not a good day for that family. Let's remember that and continue to light our homes up green. Compassion is needed more in this world than ever for so many reasons. Let's make sure we keep showing it as Kentuckians," the Governor said. "I hope that we learned that when we show compassion, when we talk to each other without initial judgement or anger, when we can put other people and their wellbeing ahead of ourselves, that's a special place to be, and I think Kentucky is that place."

As of Wednesday, there have been at least 368,152 coronavirus tests performed in Kentucky. At least 3,706 Kentuckians had recovered from the virus.

For additional information, including up-to-date lists of positive cases and deaths, as well as breakdowns of coronavirus infections by county, race and ethnicity, [click here](#).

School Opening Guidance

Gov. Beshear, Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman and Kevin Brown, interim commissioner of the *Kentucky* Department of Education, on Wednesday released long-awaited initial guidance for Kentucky schools looking ahead to opening this coming autumn.

"One of my top priorities as we have fought against the coronavirus is ensuring our children can safely return to school in the fall," said Gov. Beshear. "Our top health experts and our educators have worked together to craft this guidance to take the necessary steps to protect our children and our dedicated staff as they return to school."

The interim “Guidance on Safety Expectations and Best Practices for Kentucky Schools” covers kindergarten through 12th-grade instruction in the commonwealth.

“It is critical for everyone to do their part as good neighbors and good Americans to follow this guidance to protect our children, teachers and school personnel, and stop coronavirus outbreaks that would spread the disease, cost us more Kentuckians and further damage our economy,” Gov. Beshear said.

These safety expectations were written with input from the Education Continuation Task Force as well as the Governor’s Office, Department for Public Health, Kentucky Department of Education, the Cabinet of Education and Workforce Development and the Cabinet for Health and Family Services. Throughout this process, stakeholders from all areas of education have been engaged to provide input and expertise.

Commissioner Brown stressed the importance of wearing masks to keep schools open and students, teachers and staff members safe. He noted that we’ve already lost people key to our education community to COVID-19.

“I want to re-emphasize why it is important to have these expectations, why it is important that your child wears a mask at school. It’s important because we need to protect teachers like John Page,” Commissioner Brown said, noting that Page – a welding instructor at Monroe County Area Technology Center – died recently of coronavirus at only 47 years old. “Our welding instructors, our teachers, our students, our staff deserve to work and learn in an environment with a reduced risk of a disease without a vaccine and without a treatment. That’s why the document we are releasing today is so important and that’s why I know our districts and our teachers are going to act in good faith to reopen our schools with these expectations.”

Dr. Stack said all of the guidance and rules require some sacrifice but are needed.

“We know some of these things will be difficult to do in schools, and we tried to minimize these difficulties as much as possible when we developed the guidance,” Dr. Stack said. “But these are the things we need to do to keep students, staff and communities safe.”

Lt. Gov. Coleman said the state was working to ensure waivers will be granted to schools needing to use Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI) days.

She also announced that through Expanded Care, schools can take advantage of federal funding that covers Medicaid-eligible students for services including nursing, audiology, occupational therapy, speech therapy, physical therapy, interpreters, mobility and mental health.

“It is our duty to protect every child, but it is also our duty to protect every adult and every family member of the folks in those school buildings,” said Lt. Gov. Coleman. “The Governor, the Commissioner and I have come together to help provide the flexibility that is needed by schools to meet these unique circumstances.”

Lt. Gov. Coleman also highlighted the essential work teachers and bus drivers are called upon to perform during the global pandemic. She noted that in April, Fayette County school bus driver Eugenia Weathers, 56, died of COVID-19 and 16 other employees were sickened with the virus. In addition, in Grant County two school workers – Garylin “Stoney” Stone, 71, and Jo Ann Banks, 56, – also succumbed to the novel coronavirus.

“We are so grateful that Governor Beshear has put the health and safety of our bus drivers and students first,” said John Stovall, president of Teamsters 783 in Louisville. “Our folks are excited to get back to work, but we have to make sure we’re taking the necessary steps to prevent the spread of the virus.”

Unemployment Claims

Gov. Beshear on Wednesday announced several in-person services to address those who have filed unemployment insurance claims. The Governor reiterated his pledge to address every claim that has been filed during this unprecedented time.

“We are working day in and day out to rebuild an unemployment office that through years of neglect, and then huge cuts in 2017, started this year with 12 individuals that could face-to-face communicate with the public,” the Governor noted.

Beginning next week, in-person services will be offered five days a week in Frankfort.

In addition, officials will begin taking the services on the road. In-person services will be provided Monday and Tuesday, June 29 and 30, in Ashland and Owensboro. On July 7 and 8, in-person services will be held in Somerset and Hopkinsville.

Testing Expansion

Gov. Beshear reminded Kentuckians to take advantage of the state's partnership with Kroger, which has brought free drive-through testing across the commonwealth.

"So, our new testing sites for this week: We're going to continue in Louisville and in Lexington, and we're adding a site in Kenton County again – we are actually seeing some disturbing numbers in the Cincinnati area – and our last site for next week is going to be in Pikeville," the Governor said. "We need to make sure we get people to these sites."

Information on how to register at more than 200 sites throughout the commonwealth can be found [here](#).

Settlement Benefits Rural Hospitals

Gov. Beshear and U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell on Wednesday announced \$383 million in state and federal dollars for 54 [rural hospitals](#) by settling a 13-year-old dispute regarding Medicaid funding rates.

"Health care is a basic human right, and our rural hospitals have been having significant difficulty, long before COVID-19, in our current health care system," the Governor said. "The expansion of Medicaid in Kentucky has kept many of them open while other states have seen them shuttered, but it hasn't eliminated the true hardships that are there."

The settlement negotiated by Gov. Beshear, with support from Senate Majority Leader McConnell, successfully convinced the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to offer funding in combination with the state's liability of \$93.9 million. The previous administration had budgeted an estimated \$425 million in state funding to settle the case.

The Governor said the settlement saved the state more than \$300 million and provides long-awaited funds immediately back to rural hospitals. For more information about the settlement, [click here](#).

Building America's AgriTech Capital

Gov. Beshear took several actions today to keep his administration's promise to build America's AgriTech capital in Kentucky's Appalachian region.

"Our future is the reason that I ran for this office. I wanted to create a brighter, better future for all Kentuckians," the Governor said. "AgriTech: It is where our past meets our future, where a rich tradition

of farming turns into one of innovation – of intellectual property, of scaling ideas to help a small family farm into the next multibillion-dollar industry.”

Among the moves taken Wednesday, Gov. Beshear signed an international agreement with 16 partner organizations, including the Dutch government, that are committed to the same goal. The international agreement group was brought together by [AppHarvest](#), an innovative, [certified B corporation](#) which is creating one of the largest controlled environment agriculture facilities in the world.

“Why has everybody gravitated to this effort? Because of our state. That willingness to work, from an area of the country that has been known for powering the United States: Eastern Kentucky,” said AppHarvest founder and CEO Jonathan Webb. “We don’t believe that the future of farming in America is going to be in Boston, New York City or San Francisco. We believe the future of farming is going to be somewhere in the middle of the United States, and now it just takes leadership to determine who wants to grab it and go.”

The Governor also established an AgriTech Advisory Council to guide the commonwealth’s increased focus on this industry that will expand the state’s economy and create jobs for Kentuckians. He announced the state has launched a new website highlighting AgriTech in Kentucky, [agritech.ky.gov](#).

“This is a great day for Kentucky, but this is an especially unbelievable day for Eastern Kentucky: to see the diversification, rebuilding of an economy and a new economy we have never seen before,” said Rocky Adkins, Senior Advisor to the Governor. “This is especially rewarding for all of us who have worked so long and so hard to build up a region of Kentucky that needs to be competitive in every shape and form and fashion.”

To read news release from this morning, [click here](#).

More Information

Read about other key updates, actions and information from Gov. Beshear and his administration at [governor.ky.gov](#), [kycovid19.ky.gov](#) and the Governor’s official social media accounts [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

Kentuckians can also access translated COVID-19 information and daily summaries of the Governor’s news conference at [tinyurl.com/kygovspanol](#) (Spanish) and [tinyurl.com/kygovtranslations](#) (more than 20 additional languages).



*For official news and updates from the Beshear/Coleman administration,
visit governor.ky.gov/news.*