

Stay Home, Stay Healthy

Full transcript of the governor's address, 3/23/2020

Good evening, my fellow Washingtonians.

I'd like to speak to you directly tonight about the COVID-19 pandemic; a pandemic that threatens to overwhelm our society without decisive action.



We have now confirmed that more than 2,000 Washingtonians have contracted the virus. There are likely thousands more that have not yet been diagnosed.

COVID-19 has taken more than 100 lives in our state, a number that will also continue to rise.

Our hearts ache for all of the Washingtonians and their families affected by this virus. As we move forward, we cannot forget the losses they have suffered. This is a human tragedy, on a scale we cannot project.

It's time to hunker down in order to win this fight.

So, tonight, I am issuing a “**Stay Home**” [order](#) to fight this virus. This is Washington’s “**Stay Home, Stay Healthy**” order. This includes a ban on all gatherings, and closures of many businesses, unless those [businesses are essential](#) to the healthy functioning of our community, or are able to let employees work remotely from home.

It is still safe to go outside **using social distancing of six feet**, but only for essential purposes. The grocery stores, doctor’s offices and other essential businesses will remain open. This also does not prohibit people from merely going outside to enjoy a walk on a sunny spring day.

So life will go on, but for all of us in every part of Washington, with this in mind: **Stay Home, Stay Healthy**. The less time you spend out in public, the more lives we can save; the more time we can buy to fight the waves coming down on us now and in the immediate future.

Now I would like to talk to you about this order and what it means for you, your loved ones and our communities.

This order builds on other unprecedented steps we have taken to protect Washingtonians, including the closure of schools, restaurants, entertainment venues and other businesses where people congregate. We have been thoughtful and deliberate in making these tough choices.

I have been very clear on the need for Washingtonians to stay home, but I have heard from health professionals, local officials and others, that people still — *still* — aren’t practicing these precautions. That is one reason why I am taking these steps.

These measures are more stringent, our goal is the same: To reduce social interactions where this highly contagious virus can spread. This weapon, distancing ourselves, is the

only weapon against this virus. And we have proven that it can work, but only if we actually use it.

Here is what the order will do, **effective for a minimum of two weeks**:

It essentially requires every Washingtonian to minimize physical contact with others, unless they are pursuing essential activities, like grocery shopping, going to a doctor's appointment or the pharmacy, or if they work at a [business deemed essential](#) to continue functioning during an emergency.

This does not mean you can't go outside. If you feel like going for a walk, gardening or going for a bike ride, we consider that essential activity too for everyone's physical and mental health. We all just need to practice social distancing of six feet to protect ourselves and others — everywhere, all the time.

This order will **immediately** ban all gatherings of people for social, spiritual and recreational purposes.

This includes events that affect the old and the young in our state. If you want to have parties on the beach, play pickup basketball, or have sleepovers, **these are no longer allowed.**

This also applies to some of the most important gatherings in people's lives, like weddings and funerals. For the sake of all, even those occasions must be postponed.

Forty-eight hours from now, this order will close many businesses in our state excluding [those deemed essential](#) in these times or businesses where employees can work remotely without coming into contact with others. If a non-essential workplace can close now, it should.

[Some businesses are essential](#), and are not being closed by this order. We've chosen these essential businesses based on federal guidelines. Essential businesses and personnel **not** limited by this order include those that help us fight this outbreak, including emergency services; health care industries; critical manufacturing; child care providers; food and agriculture; transportation; financial services; defense industries; and critical local government operations, including courts.

The media will continue to operate as well. They are critical to keep the public informed.

Of course we care about all employees. So any essential business or entity allowed to operate under this order **must implement rules that help facilitate social distancing of at least six feet.**

Stay Home. Stay Healthy.

All gatherings are prohibited.

All non-essential businesses must close
unless employees can work from home.

Grocery stores, pharmacies, banks and other essential businesses may stay open.
Restaurants can continue to offer take-out and delivery.

Office of Governor Jay Inslee



I should also say to our many struggling restaurants, this order does not stop you from providing to-go and delivery service, as many of you are doing already.

Many of Washington's sovereign tribal governments around our state have already implemented similar measures and other important steps. They have been exceptional partners in this effort.

We expect everyone out there to comply with this order voluntarily. Because everyone knows all of our loved ones are at risk here.

But make no mistake, this order is enforceable by law.

To be socially irresponsible in these times is to risk the lives of our loved ones.

The rapid growth in the number of cases has put our state in a race against time. We need to grow hospital capacity or else face an even greater public health emergency.

The more of us who stay home, the fewer of us who will be infected by COVID-19, and more lives will be saved.

I make this difficult choice knowing it will add to the economic and family hardship many in our state are already feeling as we try to slow and turn back this pandemic.

We want to get back to normal as soon as possible. We don't want this to be a lingering intrusion in our lives. The fastest way to get back to normal is to hit this hard.

Why? Because Washingtonians want to get back to business.

To address this, last week I told you about steps we're taking to relieve economic impacts on affected Washingtonians. We continue the search for ways to mitigate the economic impacts of this pandemic on the lives of our 7 million residents. You can learn more about what state assistance is available by visiting [coronavirus.wa.gov](https://www.wa.gov/coronavirus).

And I cannot emphasize the following point strongly enough: For the sake of our neighbors, our health workers, our seniors and others: **No one should make a run on the grocery stores to overstock.** If each of us maintains our normal shopping habits, there will be no empty shelves.

In these uncertain times, I would encourage everyone to turn to that which brings them hope, whatever it is.

What gives me hope, are the stories of resilience and of action by individual Washingtonians to aid and comfort each other as we weather this crisis.

Stories like the school districts in Tacoma and Puyallup, that are launching child care services for our first responders and medical workers, professionals working under enormous pressure on the front lines of our war against this virus.

Our child care workers are a crucial support system in this struggle. So are our health care providers and emergency responders, because they go to work, at great risk to their own health, so we can stay home.

I'm also inspired by the story of a furniture factory in Mukilteo, that is now using its facilities to produce surgical masks and face shields for Providence health care workers, to address the threat of protective equipment shortages.

And in Yakima, where a small restaurant owner, in business only three months before this crisis hit, is now serving free brown bag lunches that seniors can pick up daily outside her restaurant.

While we minimize our physical connections, it is essential that we maximize our emotional connections.

This is temporary. Schools will reopen; weddings will happen; factories will start again; and you can toast the end of this at your favorite hangout. But every single Washingtonian must enlist themselves in this tumultuous struggle, to be thoughtful, calm and compassionate, knowing for certain we can get through this together.

I am reminded of the work of the great American poet Walt Whitman. In "Song Of Myself", he wrote of

"the courage of present times and all times," of fighting through the storm with knuckles tight and not giving back an inch to save others consumed by the tides.

We need this now in Washington. We need this now in America.

Life will be different in Washington, but we will keep working until this pandemic is defeated.

Until then, I make this promise to you, my fellow Washingtonians, borrowed from the same great poet:

"Be of good cheer, we will not desert you."

Stay home. Stay healthy. Thank you, and be well.