



**Missouri Governor — Michael L. Parson**  
Office of Communications

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## COVID-19 PRESS BRIEFING MARCH 23, 2020

3:00 PM (CST)

Good afternoon. As many of you already know, we started these daily press briefings last week in order to help keep the media and the general public as informed and up-to-date as possible.

In order to practice social distancing and abide by the order we issued last week to avoid gatherings of more than ten people, these briefings will now be virtual only.

The COVID-19 crisis changes every day, but we will continue to work through whatever challenges we might face and ensure we are doing all we can to communicate with you.

Today, there are five main topics I will provide updates on:

- Plans for the Capitol building and our state workforce,
- an Executive Order regarding restaurant sales,
- an update on Missouri's food supply,
- updates from the Department of Commerce and Insurance,
- and an update on Missouri's request for assistance through the U.S. Small Business Administration.

I'll then turn it over to DPS Director Sandy Karsten, OA Commissioner Sarah Steelman, and DCI Director Chlora Lindley-Myers.

First, I would like to address plans that are being put in place for the state workforce and the State Capitol building.

The health and safety of all Missourians – including our state workforce – is our top priority, and the best way to stop the spread of COVID-19 is by social distancing as much as possible.

Starting tomorrow, March 24th, will be closing the State Capitol and state office buildings throughout the state.

Only identified essential personnel will be allowed access to the State Capitol building, and only essential personnel will report to work at other state offices. Our Cabinet directors have identified essential personnel and will be reaching out to their teams today.

As public servants, our fellow citizens rely on us to serve them, especially during tough times. Many of you work in facilities where you have to be hands on with your job. Many of you are already working remotely, and many of you will shift to remote work or alternative arrangements in the coming days.

We will continue to work through whatever obstacles we may face to ensure we keep our state employees safe while still providing critical services to Missourians.



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I want to thank ALL of our state employees for rising to this challenge and continuing to be outstanding public servants even during such difficult times.

Now, I'd like to give an update regarding restaurant sales and Missouri's food supply.

Due to the public health threat caused by COVID-19, many restaurants have limited or ceased their normal business operations.

Today, I signed an Executive Order suspending the enforcement of local regulations that prohibit restaurants from selling un-prepared food to members of the public.

We hope this will not only assist restaurants financially during this time and avoid unnecessary waste, but also help meet the increased demand for food across the state.

Many of you have seen bare grocery store shelves. I want to assure you this is a demand issue, not a supply issue. Our food supply remains strong, and our farmers, ranchers, processors, manufacturers, and grocers across the state are working hard to get shelves restocked.

Today marks the start of National Agriculture Week, and I want to thank all of those in the agriculture industry for what they do, especially during a time like this.

Agriculture plays a vital role in taking care of our most basic needs during a public health emergency.

Missouri Department of Agriculture Director Chris Chinn will join us on Wednesday to provide more updates, but last week, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security identified food and agriculture as essential critical infrastructure workers during the COVID-19 response alongside healthcare, public safety, and other critical industries. This includes anyone working on farms, in the livestock and feed supply chain, food processing or manufacturing, grocery stores, and others.

To anyone working in food production and agriculture – from farm to fork – you have never been more important. Your efforts through these difficult times will sustain our communities and our nation. Next, I will give an update on the Missouri Department of Commerce and Insurance.

In order to expand the use of telehealth to better serve the needs of Missourians during the COVID-19 crisis, the Department of Commerce and Insurance is waiving a state statute for individuals licensed in other states. This will allow health care providers to use telehealth to collaborate in the treatment of patients. Additionally, the Division of Professional Registration is working to quickly remove certain statutory barriers that will allow more trained health care professionals to work in ways that are both safe and productive.

These include:

- Extending the time a temporary permit is valid for nurses,



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- allowing graduate nurses to continue working past the 90 day period allowed following graduation,
- continuing to increase the practical use of telehealth,
- and waiving certain existing rules and statutes to assist pharmacists in dispensing medications and managing some tasks remotely.

Lastly, I'd like to give a quick update on Missouri's recent request for assistance through the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Last week, I directed the Missouri State Emergency Management Agency and the Missouri Department of Economic Development to seek assistance for Missouri businesses through the SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loan program. The SBA has approved our request, which will make low interest disaster loans available statewide to small businesses and private, non-profit organizations severely impacted by COVID-19.

Now, I'll hand it off to Director Karsten for updates from the Department of Public Safety.

*(DIRECTOR KARSTEN SPEAKS)*

*(COMMISSIONER STEELMAN SPEAKS)*

*(DIRECTOR LINDLEY-MYERS SPEAKS)*

I want to say thank you to everyone listening today. As I said before, we will continue to work through whatever challenges we might face and ensure we are doing all we can to provide you with the most up-to-date information regarding the COVID-19 crisis.

I want to remind everyone how critically important it is to follow our order and practice social distancing ... no matter how old you are.

Even if you don't think you are at risk personally, you are putting others around you at risk by not obeying the order.

We don't want anyone to live in fear, but we do need everyone to take this seriously. This is a public health emergency, and we must all do our part to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Practice social distancing at every opportunity – regardless of your age. Maintain at least 6 feet of distance between yourself and others. Wash your hands. And most importantly, if you don't have to get out, stay home.

This is how we will stop the spread of COVID-19.

Thank you.