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Burgum announces new requirements for businesses, gatherings and masks, delays winter activities to slow spread of COVID-19

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Friday, November 13, 2020 - 10:00pm

BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Doug Burgum tonight announced several mitigation measures aimed at slowing the accelerating spread of COVID-19 in North Dakota in order to protect the vulnerable, ensure hospital capacity and keep schools and the economy open.

Capacity is strained across the state's health care system, jeopardizing the ability of hospitals to provide the first-rate treatment North Dakotans are accustomed to – not only for COVID-19 patients, but also for those seeking care for heart attacks, cancer, trauma and other urgent needs, Burgum noted.

"Our doctors and nurses heroically working on the front lines need our help, and they need it now. Since the beginning, we've taken a data-driven approach to our pandemic response, focusing on saving lives and livelihoods. Right now, the data demands a higher level of mitigation efforts to reverse these dangerous trends, to slow the spread of this virus and to avoid the need for economic shutdowns," Burgum said in a [video message](#) announcing the measures. "Our situation has changed, and we must change with it. Tonight, we're announcing four measures designed to reduce the spread of infections in our communities to protect our most vulnerable and to ensure hospital capacity."

The measures include a [State Health Officer order](#) requiring face coverings to be worn in indoor businesses and indoor public settings as well as outdoor public settings where physical distancing isn't possible. The order, signed by interim State Health Officer Dirk Wilke, is effective from Nov. 14 through Dec. 13. It includes exceptions for children under age 5, individuals with a medical or mental health condition or disability that makes it unreasonable to wear a mask, and religious services.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [said this week](#) that "adopting universal masking policies can help avert future lockdowns," and that masks protect not only the people around the individual wearing the mask but also the mask wearer.

"The most effective weapon against COVID-19 is wearing a mask," Wilke said. "This is a simple tool, but one that's critical in helping protect our loved ones and slow the spread."

Burgum signed an [executive order](#) today to implement the other mitigation measures, which take effect Monday, Nov. 16, and are as follows:

- All bars, restaurants and food service establishments are limited to 50 percent of their licensed seated capacity, not to exceed 150 patrons, and are closed to in-person service between the hours of 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. Take-out, curbside and delivery will still be allowed during those hours, and Burgum encouraged North Dakotans to take advantage and support local businesses.

For those that were already following the ND Smart Restart recommendations of 25 percent capacity in high-risk counties, the change will allow them to safely welcome more customers into their establishments with masking and distancing requirements.

Burgum noted the state will soon make \$54 million available through a hospitality grant program to help these businesses navigate this challenging time, and has made \$70 million available through the Bank of North Dakota to buy down interest on eligible existing debt for any business whose revenue was impacted negatively by COVID-19.

- All banquet, ballroom and event venues are limited to 25 percent of their maximum occupancy, not to exceed [new capacity limits](#) that have been established with input from venues and local public health officials based on the size of the venue. Physical distancing and masks will be required for the safety of all venue personnel and patrons.
- Playoff championship contests and performance events sponsored by the North Dakota High School Activities Association during the month of November may continue under NDHSAA requirements. All high school winter sports and other extracurricular K-12 school activities are suspended until Dec. 14. This also applies to all association, community and club sports for youth and adults.

College and intercollegiate activities must follow guidance from the North Dakota University System and their respective national organizations.

Burgum said the four-week pause in activities will help keep schools open to in-person instruction – the optimal learning environment for most students – and ensure that students continue to follow the mitigation strategies of wearing a mask and physical distancing.

“I fully support and endorse the orders signed today by Gov. Burgum and the State Health Officer,” said Dr. Joshua Wynne, North Dakota’s chief health strategist and dean of the University of North Dakota School of Medicine & Health Sciences. “We as citizens of North Dakota need to act now to limit further spread of the virus and thus prevent our hospital capacity from being threatened. Let’s do these things now so that by Thanksgiving the pandemic situation in North Dakota will be headed in the right direction.”

Those who violate the mask and capacity requirements may be cited for an infraction. Burgum urged law enforcement and public health agencies to prioritize education in their enforcement, providing warnings and education about the risk of transmission, while reserving penalties for the most egregious violations that put public health at risk.

Industries not covered by the executive order should continue to follow the [North Dakota Smart Restart](#) guidelines.

In addition to these four measures, state officials continue to meet daily with North Dakota’s major hospitals to optimize capacity planning and assist with resource needs.

“Despite North Dakota’s remarkable efforts at testing and case finding, these measures are no longer enough, and we are now in desperate need of implementing stronger measures in order to save lives and preserve our health care workforce and capacity,” said Dr. Paul Carson, an infectious disease specialist, professor of public health at North Dakota State University and physician advisor to the state’s COVID-19 response. “We have a growing body of good evidence that masking, especially when paired with other mitigation strategies, can substantially reduce the spread of the virus. I am very grateful that the Governor has taken the bold measure to implement an enforced mask mandate across the state, and am hopeful this will help to flatten the curve.”

Medical experts say small social gatherings with family and friends are also driving the current COVID-19 surge across the nation. Burgum urged North Dakotans to try to limit gatherings to their immediate household group as much as possible for the next four weeks and to wear a mask if gathering with people from outside the household.

“We believe in North Dakotans. We believe in the power of individual responsibility. And we need individual responsibility now more than ever to slow the spread of COVID-19,” Burgum said.

For more information on North Dakota’s COVID-19 response, visit www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus or www.ndresponse.gov.

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