

ALERT: Columbus COVID-19 Business Guidance & Call for Action

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: March 16, 2020

2:45 PM UPDATE

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Subject: Joint EDC/Chamber Statement on Community's COVID19 Response, Call for Action, & Resources for Impacted Businesses

On March 13, 2020, City of Columbus and Bartholomew County, Indiana, government officials joined representatives of Columbus Regional Health, the Bartholomew County Health Department, Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation (BCSC), and representatives of business and other private sector interests to announce a comprehensive and collaborative effort with those announced by the State of Indiana to curtail the impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to residents, employees, and businesses in our community.

The announced restrictions and other guidance by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) are designed to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community, with Health Department officials reporting its first confirmed local case, Monday, March 16. The announced actions will have business and personal implications for area employers and their workers, but health officials are urging prompt attention. As such, the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce and Greater Columbus Economic Development Corporation (EDC) are together issuing the following guidance and call for action.

STATE/LOCAL RESTRICTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following Columbus/Bartholomew County actions were announced **Friday, March 13:**

1. Businesses are encouraged to implement telework policies, if available, along with actively encouraging all sick employees to stay home and implementing other practices suggested by the CDC.
2. Local BCSC schools, which are now on Spring Break through March 20, will suspend all school-related activities beginning Monday, March 16. Schools will be closed and eLearning days utilized from Monday, March 23 through Friday, April 3.
3. Local residents and organizations, in tandem with State of Indiana guidance, are asked to limit non-essential gatherings to no more than ~~250~~ people (***max number reduced to no more than 50 persons as of 3/16***). From Governor Holcomb's March 12 announcement, "This includes any event or gathering of people who are in one room or a single space at the same time, such as cafeterias, churches, stadiums, meeting and conference rooms, auditoriums and the like." Faith-based communities are recommended to suspend all in-person services and large group gatherings from now through Saturday, April 4.
4. Childcare and adult day care facilities should take extra measures to institute social distancing and minimize large gatherings. Temporary suspension of operations should be done in consultation with the Family and Social Services agency and Indiana State Department of Health.

5. Senior centers and congregate meal services should consider suspending services and arrange for home delivery.
6. City of Columbus is closing many of its municipal public spaces, including The Commons, Donner Center, Hamilton Community Center and Ice Arena, Columbus Gymnastics Center and The Cal Brand Meeting Room within City Hall. The City will follow the school schedule with plans to reopen Monday, April 6. All other City services and offices will remain open to the public and continue to serve the community.

The following updated Columbus/Bartholomew County actions were announced March 16 at 11:30 AM:

7. Dr. Niedbalski, County Health Officer, reported the County's first confirmed case of COVID-19.
8. The City of Columbus and Bartholomew County strongly recommend that organizations and businesses consider cancelling or postponing gatherings of 50 or more per updated CDC guidelines that now state for the next 8 weeks, organizers should cancel or postpone in-person events of 50 people or more throughout the U.S.. City officials note, "Please keep in mind that the suggestion of '50' is an estimate, designed to limit the risk of transmitting the virus. If an organization has within its group a larger representation of people with risk factors (age over 60, or heart, respiratory or auto-immune issues) the limit should be less than 50."
9. Sustained "social distancing" is the community's strongest defense against the spread of the virus. Organizations (and individuals) should consider holding meetings via phone or digital means as opposed to in-person meetings.
10. City also recommends the closing of any indoor public places and encouraging requiring restaurants and bars to convert to take-out, drive-thru or delivery options. (Per Governor Holcomb's subsequent directive at 2:30 PM, bars and restaurants are required to close to in-person patrons.)
11. Residents who have the symptoms of fever, cough, or shortness of breath are strongly encouraged to call the Columbus Regional Health COVID-19 Triage Resource Center at 812-379-4449, before visiting their primary care physician or going to the hospital.

Additional directives were announced by Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb on March 16 at 2:30 PM:

12. Indiana will adhere to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for large events and mass gatherings which recommends no in-person events of more than 50 people.
13. Bars, nightclubs and restaurants are required to close to in-person patrons and may provide take-out and delivery services through the end of March.
14. Under the current guidance for schools, 273 public school districts are closed, using e-learning days, or on spring break and have announced a future closure (including BCSC). The Department of Education is working with the remaining 16 school corporations to determine their next steps.
15. Hospitals and ambulatory surgical centers should cancel and/or postpone elective and non-urgent surgical procedures immediately. This action will help the healthcare system conserve resources and personnel necessary to meet emerging health needs.
16. State employees will maximize the use of remote work, and non-essential in-person meetings will be limited to 10 persons or less and should meet virtually whenever possible.
17. Communities are encouraged to work together to provide childcare options for all who need assistance and delivery services of meals and other necessities for senior citizens.

"Beyond taking steps to limit large-group gatherings in the workplace and allowing employees to telecommute if possible, employers may face increased absenteeism or requests for time-off, as parents scramble to find alternative childcare," said Jason Hester, president of Greater Columbus EDC. "We ask all area employers to actively participate in the community's response to COVID-19 to limit its spread

locally, and we encourage employers to offer as much flexibility as possible with your employees to allow for care of their children or elderly dependents.”

“For those employers who are unable to offer remote work, employers are encouraged to consider flexible work schedules, such as modified days of the week, hours of the day, number of hours, etc., and create a safe onsite work environment with an emphasis on social distancing,” said Cindy Frey, president of the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce.

Employers who wish to support the public health goal of minimizing unnecessary contact are strongly encouraged to heed guidance offered by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), including the following:

- Actively encourage sick employees to stay home and allow employees to stay home to care for a sick family member.
- Separate sick employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath).
- Emphasize good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene among all employees by placing posters that encourage proper techniques and by providing tissues, alcohol-based hand sanitizers, etc.
- Visit the coughing and sneezing etiquette and clean hands webpage for more information.
- Perform routine cleaning of all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace.
- Take extra precautions if/when traveling. Check the CDC’s Traveler’s Health Notices for the latest guidance and recommendations by country.

“As local employers rightly encourage their workers to work remotely or stay home as needed, we are also mindful of the impact this will have on local businesses,” said Cindy Frey, president of the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce. “As local businesses follow the guidance offered by the CDC and other officials, as a community of business owners and managers, we will share all available business support tools and resources as they become available.”

As one example, Frey points to the services offered by the U.S. Small Business Administration that can help small to mid-size businesses impacted by COVID-19. These services can be accessed directly by contacting the SBA Disaster Assistance Customer Service Center at 1-800-659-2955 and/or by scheduling an appointment with a local Small Business Development Center representative housed at the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce.

“To utilize current or yet-to-be-announced federal or state assistance, one action that businesses should take now is to gather personal tax returns and business financial statements for the past two years and document COVID-19 related losses,” said Frey.

Additional tips for employers dealing with COVID-19 can be found at RestoreYourEconomy.org, a service of the International Economic Development Council and the U.S. Economic Development Administration, which encourages businesses to take certain immediate steps:

- Communicate with employees, business partners, and customers the precautions that your business and your employees need to take as guided by the CDC.
- Consider virtual meetings and/or allow employees to work offsite.
- Identify your business’ critical functions and determine the key employees needed to fulfill those functions. It may be necessary to minimize their exposure to other possible unknown carriers, including other employees .

- Reduce the amount of visits by suppliers and vendors to your workplace by purchasing in larger quantities. Establish a delivery protocol that limits employee interaction with drivers.
- Track the financial implications of revenue loss, travel restrictions, supply chain disruptions, etc., and work with State, and Federal sources (e.g., SBA loans) for potential relief.

“We also encourage local employers to keep in contact with us, so that we can monitor the impact to their businesses,” added Hester. “The more we hear from our local employers, the better we can advocate for their needs with local, state, and federal officials.”

“We urge every organization and individual to take proactive measures to act early and assertively in a concerted effort to help reduce the number of potential cases of COVID-19 in our community,” said Columbus mayor Jim Lienhoop in his remarks March 13, 2020.

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Suggested Contacts & Additional Information

Columbus/Bartholomew County

- [Columbus Regional Health](#) COVID-19 Triage Resource Center, 812-379-4449
- [Bartholomew County Health Department](#), 812-379-1550
- [City of Columbus](#) Mayor’s Office, 812-356-2500

Guidance for businesses

- [CDC guidance for businesses and employers](#)
- [SBA guidance for business & employers to plan and respond to COVID-19](#)

Economic Analysis

- [McKinsey COVID-19: Implications for business](#)

State of Indiana

- [Indiana State Department of Health](#) info on confirmed cases and guidance for community organizations
- [Governor Holcomb announcement of March 12, 2020](#)