

Health Officials Release Major Updates, New Recommendations for COVID-19



JACKSON, Miss. — Following Wednesday night’s announcement of the first reported coronavirus (COVID-19) case in the state, Mississippi State Health Officer Thomas Dobbs, MD, MPH, and Mississippi Emergency Management Association (MEMA) Executive Director Gregory S. Michel held a press conference this morning announcing major updates and new community recommendations for preventing the spread of the virus.

“The Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) is expanding access to COVID-19 testing. Physicians may now submit specimens to the Mississippi Public Health Laboratory or commercial labs without prior consultation with MSDH, just like any other lab test. This will streamline necessary testing as much as possible,” said Dr. Dobbs.

Additionally, Dobbs said the MSDH is expanding recommendations for long-term care visitors and mass social gatherings.

“We know that this virus is easily spread person to person, so we recommend limiting visitations and discontinuing any group social activities in long-term care facilities,” he said.

Regarding mass gatherings, the MSDH recommends that individuals, communities and organizations take specific steps when determining their safety or the need for cancellation.

“Stay informed of the cases in your county and surrounding counties, and maintain social distancing as practical,” said Dobbs. “Our older population and chronically ill individuals should protect themselves by avoiding gatherings of more than 250 people.”

There is no recommendation at this time that schools should close. Complete details of the updated information and guidance are available on the MSDH website.

Governor Tate Reeves and Dr. Dobbs have been working closely since the beginning of the outbreak.

“With the outbreak of the coronavirus spreading throughout the country and the world, we anticipated it eventually reaching Mississippi and planned ahead. When it comes to the health and safety of Mississippians, we’re not taking any chances,” said Gov. Reeves.

“Thanks to the advance preparation and planning ahead of confirmed cases and Dr. Dobbs’s and Director Michel’s leadership, we are prepared to respond decisively and quickly. Mississippians should not panic ♦ our approach will be calm and steady. We continue to prioritize our effort to protect public health and save lives,” he said.

Executive Director of MEMA Greg Michel says MEMA is moving to a Level-One Activation in response to COVID-19.

“This is a posturing move to make sure all of our emergency support functions are in place to assist the Mississippi State Department of Health. This activation is not to create panic. We at MEMA are ready to coordinate with our county emergency management agencies and MSDH to ensure there are no unmet needs during the response and recovery from COVID-19,” he said.