

# Coronavirus causes schools to move classes online

15 dead in Washington state

By MARTHA BELLISLE and RACHEL LA CORTE  
Associated Press

SEATTLE — The University of Washington said Friday it will stop holding classes for nearly 60,000 students at its three campuses and instead offer online instruction to help stop the spread of the worst coronavirus outbreak in the United States.

At least 79 cases of COVID-19 — the disease caused by the virus — have been confirmed in the state, with most in the Seattle area. There have been 15 deaths in the state as of Friday afternoon.

The University of Washington said the change to online-only classes will begin Monday and stay in effect through the end of winter quarter on March 20. The school said the campuses, including residence halls and athletic facilities, will remain open.

Seattle University, a private Jesuit school with 5,000 students, also plans to switch to online classes, while a number of K-12 schools in the Seattle region have closed due to virus fears, including the 22,000-student Northshore School District. Classes at Bellevue College will also be taught online through the end of the quarter.

In addition, organizers of Emerald City Comic Con, which attracts about 100,000 people, said the event has been postponed due to the coronavirus.

The chief judge for U.S. District Court's Western Washington District, Ricardo Martinez, issued an order Friday postponing all in-person hearings in Seattle and Tacoma and all grand jury



Vice President Mike Pence, right, talks with Washington Gov. Jay Inslee during a meeting with officials Thursday at Camp Murray in Washington state.

proceedings in the district until further notice due to the coronavirus outbreak.

On Friday, President Donald Trump signed an \$8.3 billion measure to help tackle the coronavirus. The legislation provides federal public health agencies with money for vaccines, tests and potential treatments and helps state and local governments prepare and respond to the threat.

Vice President Mike Pence visited Washington state on Thursday and heaped compliments on Gov. Jay Inslee for helping federal and state officials collaborate in a "seamless way."

Earlier in the week, Inslee told Pence that it would be best if the Trump administration "stuck to the science and told the truth" on the mounting public health crisis — and broadcast his prickly advice on Twitter.

Meanwhile, authorities said Friday that 30 medical professionals from the U.S. Public Health Service would arrive Saturday to help staff members at the suburban Seattle nursing facility where patients have died from the coronavirus.

"We are grateful the cavalry is arriving," King

County Executive Dow Constantine said.

Constantine and other health professionals said they were frustrated with the way Life Care Center of Kirkland has communicated with patients' families, who have complained about a lack of information about loved ones from medical staff and the government.

"We've had challenges with Life Care and I'm beginning to lose my patience," Constantine said.

A total of 69 residents remain at Life Care Center and 15 others have been moved to hospitals, he said. Officials were working to run COVID-19 tests on every patient who has died at the facility, said Patty Hayes, director of health for Seattle and King County.

Relatives of Life Care Center residents held an emotional news conference Thursday outside the facility.

"We've been complaining for days about the lack of information we have received," said Kevin Connolly, whose father-in-law lives at the nursing home. "If adequate controls cannot be put in place, we want our loved ones moved to a safe location immediately."

# Coronavirus: At least 35 cruise ships are destined for Astoria

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Officials are tracking down thousands of passengers who might have come in contact with him during the trip.

The Grand Princess has around 3,500 passengers and crew aboard, with at least 62 passengers from the previous voyage. The ship canceled a stop in Ensenada, Mexico, before heading toward San Francisco.

The Grand Princess is the second Princess Cruises ship to be quarantined at sea after the Diamond Princess was held offshore for weeks near Yokohama, Japan.

Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones, a former commander of the Coast Guard's Sector Columbia River, has sought to allay concerns as some have called on the city to bar cruise ship passengers from town.

Local, county, state and federal officials have been in contact on how to respond to potential COVID-19 cases, Jones said, and the Coast Guard can order a ship held offshore if there is a report or suspicion of an illness. There are more than 20 days before the Grand Princess could leave port in California headed for Astoria.

"I feel like we have time to be calm and plan diligently," the mayor said. "We don't need to make rash decisions immediately. We'll just continue to monitor the situation as it unfolds with all of our partners."

But fears of COVID-19 might already be having a local impact.

Hand sanitizers have become a rare commodity, selling out at some stores.

Craig Hoppes, the superintendent of the Astoria School District, sent out a letter to parents echoing common-sense advice from health officials such as proper hand-washing,

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Mayor Bruce Jones

avoiding contact with sick people and staying home if sick.

"While the coronavirus situation is troubling, it is important to remember that fear, rumors and stigma do not stop the spread of disease and can create difficulties in sharing accurate information," the superintendent wrote.

Attendance has already dipped at some local social events, such as story time at the Astoria Library. Suzanne Harold, the children's librarian, said she does not know for sure if fears about the coronavirus are to blame, as attendance can also fluctuate because of sunny weather or the flu.

Concern about the virus has also begun to impact local businesses in other small ways.

Heidi Dlubac, of Good to Go, a soup, salad and sandwich shop in downtown Astoria, was supposed to supply lunch for a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation meeting next week.

But the organization, following guidance to reduce travel where possible because of the virus outbreak, canceled. The meeting will now be held via webinar, said Rob Blumenthal, the communications director for the foundation.

Some locals have voiced frustration on social media about incoming cruise ships. The Astoria City Coun-

cil faced calls Monday from some people wanting to delay or cancel arrivals unless cruise ship companies could guarantee none of the passengers have COVID-19.

"My great-grandparents lived through three prairie grass fires," Ted Thomas, a resident, told the City Council, calling for a quarantine of cruise ships. "When you see the smoke on the horizon, you stop everything and plow a circle around your house, and you wet blankets, and you beat embers out that come across that break."

Gov. Kate Brown on Thursday announced an agreement with health insurers to waive cost-sharing for customers needing COVID-19 testing. Several insurers, including Providence Health Plan and Moda Health, have so far agreed to participate.

At least 35 cruise ships carrying around 75,000 passengers are destined for Astoria this year, including the Grand Princess on March 31, May 7 and Oct. 18.

Conner has said some cruise ships are repositioning away from Asia itineraries. Astoria is now in line for two new visits by the Celebrity Millennium, a Celebrity Cruises ship, April 22 and April 27, he said, while other ships are still looking for new ports to visit.

Katie Frankowicz contributed to this report.

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