

Inslee bans large events as virus declared pandemic

Seattle area the most impacted

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Associated Press

SEATTLE — Hoping to curb the spread of the coronavirus, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee on Wednesday banned gatherings and events of more than 250 people in three western Washington counties covering hundreds of miles and millions of people.

Inslee’s proclamation applies to King, Snohomish and Pierce counties, which include the cities of Seattle, Tacoma and Everett, home to almost 4 million people. The order does not include schools or workplaces.

“This is not just your ordinary flu,” Inslee said. “This demands a response consistent with the nature of the threat.”

Washington has at least 29 COVID-19 deaths and more than 260 confirmed cases. Nineteen of the deaths are linked to one suburban Seattle nursing home and authorities in King County said the virus has spread to at least 10 long-term care facilities.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown will hold a press conference Thursday to announce new steps to stem the spread of the coronavirus, addressing mass gatherings, social distancing and workplace practices to slow transmission.

Testifying in Washington, D.C., Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, warned that the outbreak in the U.S. is going to get worse.

“I can say we will see more cases, and things will get worse than they are right now,” Fauci told the House Oversight and Reform Committee. Facing questions from lawmakers, Fauci explained, “It is 10 times



Workers from a Servpro disaster recovery team wearing protective suits and respirators line up before entering the Life Care Center in Kirkland, Washington, to begin cleaning and disinfecting the facility on Wednesday.

more lethal than the seasonal flu.”

“I am fully prepared to use the full power of the Federal Government to deal with our current challenge of the CoronaVirus!” President Donald Trump tweeted before a meeting with bankers in which he assured that “we are going to get the problem solved.”

The Washington state governor’s order prohibits “social, spiritual and recreational activities including, but not limited to, community, civic, public, leisure, faith-based, or sporting events; parades; concerts; festivals; conventions; fundraisers; and similar activities.”

It would cover sporting events like Seattle Mariners baseball and Seattle Sounders soccer games. Inslee said the ban on events and gatherings in the Seattle area would run through the month of March and could be extended.

Inslee said government had the authority to crack down on groups or individuals who ignored the direc-

tive, but added he expected people would abide by the order. Asked specifically about penalties for violating the event size limit, he said: “The penalties are you might be killing your granddad if you don’t do it.”

That decision could impact the Mariners first seven games of the season against the Texas Rangers and Minnesota Twins, plus home games for the MLS Seattle Sounders, XFL Seattle Dragons and a pair of junior hockey teams in the area.

NCAA basketball tournament games will not be open to the general public because of concerns about the spread of coronavirus.

NCAA President Mark Emmert said Wednesday that he made the decision to conduct both the men’s and women’s tournaments, which begin next week, with only essential staff and limited family in attendance. The decision comes after the NCAA’s COVID-19 advisory panel of medical experts recommended against playing sporting

events open to the general public.

Also Wednesday, the Seattle Public School system announced it will close due to the coronavirus outbreak. In a statement, the Seattle Public Schools said that beginning Thursday all instruction and activities would be canceled until further notice. A district north of Seattle, the Northshore Public School District with 22,000 students, had already closed schools and is teaching students online.

The University of Washington announced Wednesday that fans will be barred from sporting events.

San Francisco’s mayor on Wednesday banned for two weeks all gatherings of 1,000 or more people, including Golden State Warriors games. Santa Clara County in California, home to San Jose and Silicon Valley, on Monday announced a ban on all gatherings of 1,000 people or more.

Dow Constantine, King County executive, said at Wednesday’s news conference that the county is



Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin listens as President Donald Trump talks to reporters after meeting with Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill on Tuesday.

imposing a prohibition on smaller events, with fewer than 250 people, unless they meet public health guidelines that include social distancing and screening. Those prohibitions wouldn’t include grocery stores or family gatherings.

“Today’s actions will help relieve the strain on our hospital system,” Constantine said.

Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan said: “We will get through it, it will be hard.”

Amid Italy’s travel and social restrictions, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said all stores except pharmacies and grocery stores are being closed nationwide in response to the country’s coronavirus outbreak.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi planned to unveil the economic assistance package, with voting possible as soon as Thursday, on sick pay and other measures to help those self-quarantining or missing work as officials encourage people to limit social interactions to slow the rise of infections.

After lawmakers from both parties rebuffed Trump’s proposed payroll tax break, bipartisan support appeared to be forming for the House’s package, which would focus on more immediate issues — sick pay, unemployment benefits, free tests and other resources for Americans suddenly hit by the crisis.

Dr. Jeff Duchin, health officer for Public Health — Seattle & King County, said the region is facing a health emergency as the number of cases double every few days.

“We expect a large-scale outbreak in weeks and this will be a very difficult time,” he said. “It’s similar to what you might think of as an infectious disease equivalent of a major earthquake that’s going to shake us for weeks and weeks.”

For most people, the coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. The vast majority of people recover within a few weeks.

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