

CORONAVIRUS

Washington coronavirus deaths now up to 67

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OLYMPIA, Wash. — Washington state health officials reported 13 new deaths from the coronavirus on Wednesday, bringing the state tally of fatalities to 67 — the highest in the country.

Also, Gov. Jay Inslee announced a 30-day statewide moratorium on evictions of residential tenants as the state continues to grapple with containing the spread of COVID-19 and the impact it is having on the state’s economy as businesses are forced to temporarily close and employees are laid off.

“We recognize we are in extraordinary times, and it is necessary to do what we can to help Washingtonians weather this storm,” he said.

Ten of the newly announced deaths were in King County and five were associated with the Life Care Center, a nursing home in Kirkland, Washington. To date, 35 of the state’s deaths were linked to that facility. Overall, 56 deaths have been reported in King County. Clark County also



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson

Medical personnel wait for a driver to pull up at a drive-through COVID-19 testing station for University of Washington Medicine patients on Tuesday in Seattle.

reported a death Wednesday — the county’s third. Pierce County reported its first fatality from the disease and Snohomish County has reported six deaths. Grant County has reported one death.

For most people, the new 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 from the new virus.

Inslee’s move to help people facing housing issues came as the Federal Housing Finance Agency directed Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to suspend foreclosures and evictions for at

least 60 days due to the outbreak. The state moratorium was among several policies announced Wednesday that are intended to offer relief to businesses and their employees as the number of coronavirus cases topped 1,100.

For workers who have been laid off after the statewide order that closed restaurants, bars, gyms and other facilities through at

least the end of the month, Inslee announced a waiver of the one-week waiting period to receive unemployment insurance. The order is retroactive for claims filed up to March 8, the day of the governor’s first emergency rule expanding unemployment insurance criteria to cover more workers impacted by the coronavirus outbreak. The governor is still seeking a major disaster declaration in the state so that residents otherwise not eligible for unemployment insurance could get help under the Disaster Unemployment Assistance program.

Up to \$5 million will be made available as microgrants to small businesses across the state to help prevent permanent closure.

The measures were announced hours after the Employment Security Department released its monthly unemployment rate update, showing that the rate for February was 3.8%. In a written statement, Paul Turek, economist for the department, said that hiring in the state was strong last month, but noted that the numbers reflected a time before the current concerns

and actions in response to COVID-19.

“Our record low unemployment rate is unlikely to last, however, as the economic impacts from containment efforts become more clear,” he said.

ESD Commissioner Suzi LeVine said that last week, they saw a 150% increase in unemployment benefit claims.

“We have seen a substantial spike and increase even from that 150% this week,” she said.

The Department of Revenue will also have authority to waive penalties and interest on certain late tax payments for things like property tax exemption renewals, excise tax interest on business and occupation taxes, and real estate sales. The state will create payment plans on the amount businesses owe without filing tax liens in federal courts. This also means the suspension of enforcement actions, such as forced collections by seizing bank accounts. These measures would be in force for at least 30 days. These actions are retroactive to Feb. 29, the date the governor initially declared a state of emergency.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

