For Immediate Release

MCHD issues order outlining new COVID-19 business guidelines

MORGANTOWN, WV (April 7, 2020) — Monongalia County Health Department has issued an order detailing how essential businesses still operating can comply with Gov. Jim Justice’s executive order issued last Friday aimed at counties with higher incidents of COVID-19, including Monongalia County.

“It is necessary that essential businesses and operations further limit the number of employees and members of the public entering and existing their premises, and to the maximum extent possible, must shift workers off-premises to the maximum extent possible,” the order states.

The order went into effect at noon Tuesday.

The order limits outdoor activities to a five-person gathering while maintaining social distancing of at least six feet from each other. All essential businesses shall order their employees and/or contractors, to the maximum extent possible, to work from home or residence, or to otherwise work remotely.

Also, MCHD is directed to establish and enforce protocols to limit occupancy of any such business that remains open to the public on an individual-per-square basis.

The order also notes that West Virginia Code 16-3-2 authorizes Monongalia County Health department to establish quarantine of any individuals to prevent the spread of any infectious or communicable diseases.

Any resident of Monongalia County who has a critical need for goods and services and is unable to obtain them is encouraged to call WV 211 United Way Information and Referral Line to seek assistance.
Dr. Lee B. Smith, MCHD executive director and county health officer, noted that the order has been vetted through the Monongalia County Board of Health, the Monongalia County Commission, the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office of Monongalia County, Monongalia County Emergency Management and the West Virginia Retailers Association.

This order reinforces Gov. Justice’s stay-at-home order that all individuals in the county should not leave their place of residence other than for an essential activity. This includes limiting visits to the greatest extent possible. Also, groups engaging in outdoor activities, including the sale of food products or farm goods, are limited to a maximum of five people who must maintain a six-foot distance from one another at all times.

Essential businesses shall have employees work remotely to the maximum extent possible.

Businesses that remain open will:
- Implement a plan to limit staff to essential personnel only.
- Implement social distancing practices within and around the workplace including remaining 6 feet away from others.
- Supply adequate disinfectant and hygienic supplies to employees, such as wipes or spray, hand sanitizer, soap and water, and, when at all possible, face masks and gloves.
- Provide protective barriers for employees exposed to the general public. These may include safety glasses, masks and plexiglass shields.

Any businesses permitted or choosing to remain open and requiring employees to report to work shall establish access restrictions and follow these guidelines:
- No more than two individual members of the public may enter into the business per 1,000 square feet of public space at any given time.
- To ensure the number of people per square foot is not exceeded, the business shall keep track of the number of people who enter and leave the store on a one-in, one-out basis after capacity is reached.
- The business shall take actions to establish that social distancing among customers is enforced to the greatest extent possible, including but not limited to marking distances six feet apart, at any area where people are likely to congregate, stand in line. One-way aisles can be created to limit close contact with other people. Customers should be encouraged, when possible, to place orders ahead, that will allow them to pick up and pay without entering the business.
• Prominently display these regulations, including posting maximum person occupancy of each essential business under the square footage regulations established in this order, at no fewer than five locations.

In regard to MCHD’s authority to establish quarantine:
• Any person awaiting COVID-19 test results shall self-quarantine until the results are known and reported to the health department;
• Any person diagnosed with COVID-19 will self-isolate for at least 14 days in a portion of their home or residence that limits, as much as possible, contact with other members of their household.
• Whenever possible, individuals suspected of or having been diagnosed with COVID-19 should use their own bathrooms.
• Any person living in the same household as a person suspected or diagnosed with COVID-19 or who has had known contact with a diagnosed person should contact Monongalia County Health Department at 304-598-5100 for additional instructions.

Finally, pursuant to Order 21-20, the West Virginia State Police are directed to provide support in enforcing the terms of this order. If WVSP are not available, Monongalia County Sheriff’s Department and all municipal law enforcement agencies in Monongalia County may be called upon to enforce this order.

The West Virginia National Guard is requested to support local health departments by assisting with spot-checking businesses.

The full order will be posted on the health department’s website, monchd.org.

Dr. Smith pointed to the situation in New York as to why these steps are essential for Monongalia County to slow the spread of COVID-19.

“We’re still in the containment phase and we’d like to stay there,” he added.

Also on Tuesday, Dr. Smith issued a recommendation that everyone wear masks when they do go outside.

“Infected people with or without symptoms of illness may spread this virus by simply breathing, talking, singing or yelling,” the recommendation states. “All these actions will create aerosols of tiny airborne virus particles that can float suspended in air for three hours. Because people may not be effectively covering their sneezes and coughs, masks and facial coverings are more important to protect the public and each other from this disease.”
Check out monchd.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD and on Instagram at #wvmchd for up-to-date information on health and wellness in the community.

—30—