

'We crossed a line today': Dunleavy orders statewide shelter in place, limits travel

By Casey Grove & Tegan Hanlon, Alaska Public Media - March 27, 2020 5:30 pm



Gov. Mike Dunleavy speaks at a news conference on Wednesday, March 25, 2020. (Office of the Governor)

Gov. Mike Dunleavy on Friday ordered Alaskans to stay home and banned most travel within the state as the number of coronavirus cases continues to grow, and [the first resident died in the state after testing positive for COVID-19](#).

"We crossed a line today for Alaska," Dunleavy said at a [Friday evening news conference](#), where he announced a pair of new mandates.

The first requires Alaskans to "remain at their place of residence and practice social distancing." People can still go outside, but they must remain 6 feet or more away from individuals not in their households.

The state is calling it a "social distancing" mandate, but it effectively operates like the shelter-in-place orders that governors across the country have put into place, and that a chorus of Alaska doctors and legislators have called on Dunleavy to issue. Many communities, including in Anchorage and rural Alaska, have already announced versions of shelter-in-place or "hunker-down" orders for their residents.

[Read the social-distancing mandate here.](#)

"The tightening of the mandates is due, in part, to the rising cases and trying to slow the spread so we have time to build up the healthcare capacity," Dunleavy said.

Related: [Anchorage patient first to die from COVID-19 in Alaska](#)

The statewide mandate goes into effect at 5 p.m. Saturday and will be re-evaluated in about two weeks, said Adam Crum, commissioner of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.

Grocery stores, banks, pharmacies and gas stations, among other essential businesses, can remain opened. Restaurants can still provide take-out, according to the state.

Dunleavy underscored that Alaskans can recreate outside, but they must keep their distance from people they don't live with. That will help slow the spread of the virus, and protect vulnerable Alaskans, including elders, he said.

"If you want to go outside and walk your dog, you can do that as long as you're 6 feet away from somebody else. If you want to jog, same thing, 6 feet away from someone else," Dunleavy said. "If you want to go ice fishing, 6 feet away from someone else, or snowshoeing or four-wheeling."

According to [a document from the state explaining the mandates](#), law enforcement officials will respond to complaints about Alaskans not following the social-distancing order, and will focus on educating the public. At the news conference, Dunleavy described enforcement as Alaskans “self-policing.”

The other new mandate bans travel between communities in the state, unless that travel is to support critical infrastructure or is for critical personal needs. That mandate goes into effect at 8 a.m. Saturday and allows for certain small Alaska communities to implement further restrictions.

[Read the travel mandate here.](#)

Dunleavy said Alaska needs time to build up its healthcare infrastructure to handle the coronavirus.

“This seemingly simple approach of just staying away from each other is probably the best defense we have right now to slow this down,” Dunleavy said.

“It’s going to hit us and, like I said, there’s going to be a lot of us that will be impacted,” he said. “But working together, especially over the next two weeks, I think we can make a huge difference, and by that time, we’ll have many more swabs, and be able to test many more people.”

By Friday, the number of known COVID-19 cases in Alaska **had increased to 85**, up 16 cases from the day before. The new cases include nine male and seven female patients. One is a child, according to the state health department.

Nine of the newly-diagnosed Alaskans are from Anchorage, one is from Girdwood, three are from Fairbanks, one is from North Pole, one is from Juneau and one is from Ketchikan, the department said.

Across the United States, the coronavirus continues to rapidly spread. By Thursday, the U.S. had more coronavirus cases than any other country in the world. As the pandemic takes hold, about two dozen states have ordered their residents to stay at home, [The New York Times reported](#). In more than a dozen other states without a statewide mandate, cities and counties have issued the order.

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