

Subscribe



Manchester Journal ^(/)

Main menu

 View fullscreen



(/uploads/original/20200402-193321-ban-l-sign-2-T5_90965.jpg)

A sign installed on Route 7A in Pownal near the Massachusetts state line tells visitors about Gov. Phil Scott's new 14-day self-isolation order.

PHOTOS BY DAVID LACHANCE - BENNINGTON BANNER

Gov. Scott issues travel

order for state

Posted Thursday, April 2, 2020 7:33 pm

Don't miss the big stories. Like us on Facebook. Like 5.1K

By Patricia LeBoeuf, Manchester Journal

MONTPELIER — In a continued effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus-caused disease COVID-19, Gov. Phil Scott has issued new restrictions on travelers, ordering anyone traveling to Vermont for anything other than an essential purpose to home quarantine for 14 days.

Scott, at a press conference Monday, also strongly discouraged travel to Vermont by those coming from COVID-19 "hot spots" including, among others, the states of Florida and Louisiana and the cities of Detroit, Chicago and New York City.

Scott acknowledged that the order does not provide for any specific enforcement of the travel restrictions.

"We are not going to be able to enforce our way through this," he said. "We need everyone entering Vermont to be a good neighbor and abide by the self-isolation directive.

"Here's what I want everyone to understand — if you don't need to come to Vermont, please don't," Scott said. "This is about public health and safety."

Residents of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut should stay in their home states in strict compliance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention travel guidance issued last Saturday, according to the order. That CDC guidance urges residents of those states to refrain from non-essential domestic travel for 14 days, effective immediately, due to extensive community transmission of COVID-19 in the area.

Scott cautioned against adopting an "us-versus-them" mentality.

"That's not who we are as Americans, and certainly not as Vermonters," he said. "We've got to remember, as Americans, we're all in this together. So I'm asking everyone to join us in this effort."

Local reaction

Local representatives support the governor's restriction on travel, but as representatives of an area dependent upon tourism, they also want people to remember the importance that visitors have on the local economy.

Rep. Kathleen James echoed the governor's cautions.

"For the past several weeks, I've been working with a group of state reps from ski towns across the state to share information, brainstorm ideas and submit suggestions and requests to the Scott administration," James said.

"We've been speaking as one voice to tell the story of communities like ours — where second homeowners and tourists are a vital and welcome part of the economy, yet our retail and healthcare infrastructure are under tremendous stress in the face of the COVID-19 crisis."

James said the group has been focused on two messages.

"One, we're all in this together. A divisive "us versus them" mentality is not helpful," James said. "Two, Vermont is operating under a state of emergency, and we all need to follow the same strict rules. Gov. Scott's latest travel and lodging

restrictions accomplish both of those goals and will help to keep all of us safer. It's not business as usual in Vermont, and we can't pretend that it should be. These latest steps should go a long way toward ensuring that everyone is receiving that important public-health message."

Rep. Linda Joy Sullivan said fear is understandable but we have a collective strength.

"I do understand that people are fearful, but I like to think that we best demonstrate our strength and character when we provide a form of refuge to those seeking a safe place to ride out this adversity," Sullivan said. "Provided everyone acts responsibly, we're stronger as a community when we welcome those in need. Everyone just needs to take the public admonitions seriously and follow the rules. We're in this together."

Rep. Cynthia Browning said we are in difficult times and she is trusting the governor and the experts advising him to know best.

"Our first concern must be for those who are ill and for those caring for them," Browning said. "Our second concern must be to slow the spread of this disease by obeying social distancing rules as much as we can. We will return to issues about how to revive our usual economic activity later. The governor's latest order seems quite restrictive. But he has access to information and expert advice that I do not, so I will not second guess him."

Essential purposes

Essential purposes as defined in Scott's order include travel required for personal safety; food, beverage or medicine; medical care; care of others; and to perform work, services or functions deemed critical to public health and safety, as well as economic and national security, as set forth in Scott's recent "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order.

That order, issued on March 24, directed non-essential businesses to cease in-person operations in Vermont; that order identified lodging as essential "to the extent required to support COVID-19 response, critical infrastructure and national security."

Monday's order, Scott said at the press conference, provides more certainty on what that means, clarifying that hotels, motels, bed-and-breakfasts, short-term rentals (e.g. Airbnb, Homeaway, VRBO), campgrounds and RV parks must be closed, except when essential.

Monday's order also forbids online reservations for lodging.

Because there are so many hot spots for COVID-19 around the country, said Vermont Health Commissioner Dr. Mark Levine, this effort "is just plain sound public health policy, and it will protect us all."

Michael Schirling, commissioner of the Vermont Department of Public Safety, said at the press conference that law enforcement monitored compliance with lodging closures this past weekend. Of 318 known lodging properties – excluding those like Airbnbs – 88 were open, half were in compliance, and 44 appeared to be non-compliant, he said.

On Sunday, those properties received a letter indicating they need to bring their operations into compliance, and the attorney general will be following up, he said. After that, there will be regular monitoring by law enforcement.

"We have every belief these properties will become compliant and we'll be able to maintain health and safety as a result," Schirling said.

Providers may allow guests who are already there to remain through the end of their scheduled stay.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER THESE ADS

The order is in effect until April 15, but may be amended or extended as needed. Scott's "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order is in effect until that same date.

When asked if he had any doubt the "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order would have to be extended, Scott said, "I think everyone should expect that this will be extended."

"In terms of how long – that's a good question," he said.

The state will be sharing its modeling within the next few days, as it's important to understand how critical it is that Vermont gets its response to COVID-19 right, so as not to overwhelm the health care system, he said.

"If we take this seriously this will go a lot better than the alternative," Scott said.

Officials expect a peak in COVID-19 cases sometime in April, he said.

Testing updates

Vermont has created a COVID-19 patient test site at Landmark College in Putney.

This site is being established to provide additional testing capacity for people who have a referral from their health care provider, and began operating Sunday. The Landmark College site will be operated by the medical division of the Vermont National Guard.

The hours, and for how many days the site is open, will depend on the availability of testing supplies, the Health Department previously said.

"Early and broad testing is a proven strategy to mitigate the spread of this virus," Levine said at Monday's press conference.

It's still early enough in the spread of COVID-19 in Vermont that this can help flatten the curve, he said, while emphasizing that people cannot just show up for testing. "We continue to rely on your own physician's judgement," he said, adding that if people are tested before they have symptoms, they may have a false negative test.

"As our testing capacity increases, you can expect to see an increase in the number of positive tests," he said. This will reflect more tests, but not necessarily more positives, he said.

There is currently no plan for wide scale testing, however, Levine said.

"Testing is not treatment," he said. "Testing will occur for those that become symptomatic."

In response to a question regarding how long Vermont may wait to see a change in the curve of infections through staying home, Levine said "most people think it's in the several-week range."

But testing isn't the only way to see if the state reaches a plateau in cases – officials will also be looking at other indicators, like hospitalizations, he said.