

DeWine Announces Recommendations To Slow Virus Spread

Looking for ways to slow the spread of coronavirus in Ohio, Gov. Mike DeWine on Tuesday called for upcoming indoor sporting events to be played without spectators.

The recommendation – along with many others – was made in consultation with medical experts, the governor said.

"With only three confirmed cases in Ohio, people might say, 'Mike why are you doing this,'" he said at a Statehouse news conference. "The answer is we've learned from what's happened in other countries." The governor acknowledged the difficulty in making the suggestion with the NCAA basketball tournament just around the corner. Both Dayton and Cleveland are set to host early-round games. "I understand how difficult this is, and it's not something that anyone enjoys talking about," he said. The Ohio State High School Athletic Association announced later it would comply with the recommendation, although it said spectators could attend Tuesday's regional basketball tournament games and that it will announce how the tournaments will proceed moving forward on Wednesday morning.

"This will be a very difficult time for our schools and fans, but we cannot ignore the directive of the governor," Executive Director Jerry Snodgrass said in a statement. "We are pleased that our tournaments can continue, and we will soon determine who can attend. However, we can already say that it will most likely be no more than the immediate family of the student-athletes participating in the event."

Gov. DeWine said both the Cleveland Cavaliers and the Columbus Blue Jackets have pushed back, citing the quality of their in-arena ventilation systems.

The governor, however, did not rule out issuing an order in the future. In the interest of avoiding large crowds, Mr. DeWine also recommended that people avoid tailgating outside of outdoor sporting events.

He also said he recommended the state's institutions of higher learning follow the lead of Ohio State University and move to all-remote classes for the time being. Several universities in other states have done the same.

OSU announced the suspension of face-to-face instruction through at least March 30, along with the suspension of all university-sponsored international travel through April 20. The university also advised that no new, non-essential events will be scheduled on campus through April 20.

"While there are no campus-associated cases of COVID-19, we know that there are at least three confirmed cases in the state of Ohio, and we expect that there will be more. We are being proactive in an effort to prevent illness and continue the important work of the university," President Michael Drake said in a statement.

"I understand that our policy guidelines will cause measurable disruption, but the risk of not acting outweighs the inconvenience of these temporary measures. The safety of our campus community is always our top priority. Your cooperation and collaboration will help to ensure an appropriate response across our institution to this rapidly changing matter."

Multiple other public universities – including Kent State, the University of Toledo, Ohio University, Miami University and the University of Akron – followed suit shortly after the governor's press conference.

While not recommending that K-12 schools do the same, the governor said that they should be prepared to do so in the future.

"Coronavirus is changing the way we are operating and causing great inconvenience," he said. The governor also called on nursing homes to stringently screen visitors and vendors.

The Department of Rehabilitation and Correction and the Department of Youth Services have begun to disallow visitors and are only allowing those critical to the mission of the facilities inside after their temperatures have been taken.

In a letter to Gov. DeWine Tuesday, the ACLU of Ohio called on him to develop a plan to prevent an outbreak among the incarcerated population, including through education, provision of hygiene supplies, additional cleaning, screening and testing of those in custody and data collection.

"This is an urgent matter," the group wrote. "Having an appropriate, evidence-based plan in place can help prevent an outbreak and minimize its impact if one does occur. The cost of inadequate planning may be measured in lives."

The governor's recommendations come the day after the administration announced three confirmed cases of the coronavirus in Ohio. Department of Health Director Amy Acton said another 15 people remain under investigation and 14 individuals have tested negative.

However, she said that based on experiences in other areas, the number of those infected are sure to go up, but the governor's recommendations can minimize the spread.

"There are things we can do now that absolutely make a difference," she said.