

**From:** [Jay Inslee](#)  
**To:** [Karlana Allbery](#)  
**Subject:** Important information and updates regarding COVID-19  
**Date:** Thursday, March 12, 2020 11:26:47 AM

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## From the Desk of Jay Inslee

Friend,

I wanted to reach out with some updates on our response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Washington state -- I know this email is a lot longer than what I usually send, but it has important information that I hope you'll read:

**Yesterday morning, I issued an emergency proclamation to prohibit events with more than 250 people in King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties. The goal of the new social distancing plan is to minimize COVID-19 spread in the counties most impacted by the virus -- that's why this directive is for social, spiritual, and recreational gatherings.**

This is an unprecedented public health situation, and we know that the folks on the margins of our society will be hit first and worst by the economic hardships put forward by this virus -- that's why, earlier this week, I rolled out new rules within the Washington Employment Security Department to support businesses and employees by enhancing the flexibility of unemployment insurance, providing leniency for those impacted by isolation or quarantine, and granting leave and telework options for state employees.

**[Review this new and helpful resource on the Washington Employment Security Department's website to learn more.](#)**

I'm also including a summary of the new rules below but encourage you to [visit the Employment Security Department's website for specifics.](#)

### **Flexibility with Unemployment Insurance**

Rules went into effect this week that help relieve the burden of temporary layoffs, isolation, and quarantine by ensuring unemployment benefits to individuals whose employment has been directly impacted by COVID-19.

Note some specific changes under these new rules:

- Workers may receive unemployment benefits and employers may get relief of benefit charges if an employer needs to shut down operations temporarily because a worker becomes sick and other

- workers need to be isolated or quarantined as a result of COVID-19.
- Standby will be available for part-time workers as well as full-time workers, as long as they meet the minimum 680 hours.
  - Workers that are asked to isolate or quarantine by a medical professional or public health official as a result of exposure to COVID-19 may receive unemployment benefits and work search requirements could be waived, so long as they have a return date with their employer. The return to work date can be the date the isolation or quarantine is lifted.
  - If a worker falls seriously ill and is forced to quit, they cannot collect unemployment benefits while they are seriously ill but may be eligible once they recover and are able and available for work.

## **Leave and Telework Options for State Employees**

I've also helped state employees impacted by COVID-19 by expanding their sick leave so they won't be required to take existing sick, vacation, or family leave and encouraging state organizations to explore all possible options to expand telework for employees.

**[These COVID-19 scenarios and benefits and more are covered on this quick and easy resource available on the Washington Employment Security Department's website.](#)**

Lastly, we know that the risks of severe illness and death from COVID-19 appear to be higher in people 60 years or older or in those with chronic health conditions. We have new rules going into effect this week for those visiting or working in nursing homes and assisted living facilities that include heightened security and health screenings.

**For both these rules and anything else, the overall guidance remains the same: If you feel sick, stay home. Period. This is not just about your health but the health of all of us -- especially our most vulnerable communities -- here in Washington state.**

We can get through this if we work together -- and we will.

Very truly yours,

Jay



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