

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COVID-19 FAQs

? Should we declare a local state of emergency, how long should it be?

Yes. Due to the unique nature of the coronavirus (Covid-19), where human contact can have deadly consequences, municipalities are urged to declare a state of emergency which will legally allow you to close your facilities and temporarily stop public meetings, thus helping to limit the spread of the disease. The Emergency Services Management Code in Title 35 references a seven-day local declaration unless an elected body agrees to a different length of time. DCED recommends at least a 14-day proclamation or ideally following the lead of the commonwealth on setting an end date to a state of emergency.

? What should our proclamation of disaster emergency look like?

Here are two examples:

[The Governor's proclamation](#)

OR

[The Municipal Coordinator's Handbook](#)  (pages 40 and 41)

? Should we shut down our municipal building?

Yes. The governor's proclamation directed governments across all levels to continue to provide essential life-saving services and remain functioning and available for questions. However, in reaction to Covid-19 municipalities must operate temporarily in ways that limit person-to-person interactions. Municipalities should practice social distancing and limit or cease offering non-essential services and events. Limit visitors by providing services online and on the phone, allow bills to be paid at a drop box or behind a window, or provide other means to do business with the municipality without personal contact.

? With April 15 rapidly approaching, will this change tax and other deadlines?

The deadlines for local, state, and federal taxes have been extended to July 15. The legislative due date of April 1 to submit the DCED Annual Audit and Financial Report has not changed at present and a decision will be forthcoming. We understand you are facing stressful and extraordinary times, and DCED encourages municipalities to do their best to meet deadlines.

? Is DCED available to help and answer questions?

Yes. DCED staff are teleworking and available. This means staff can take calls and answer questions but may not attend in-person meetings. Please contact the Center for Local Government Services with questions and concerns at 888.223.6837 OR ra-dcedclgs@pa.gov.

? Should we cancel our municipal meetings?

Continuity of government is essential but must be conducted differently in these extraordinary times:

- Consider live-streaming meetings through Facebook Live, Skype, GoToMeeting, or other platforms. Some providers are currently offering free service.
- To encourage less in-person attendance, provide alternative means for public comment, such as an email address where comments may be submitted in advance or a call-in number.

The [Sunshine Act](#) is clear that public meetings should be held at public buildings with open public participation whenever possible. If an official emergency declaration prevents that from happening, a meeting via teleconference, webinar, or other electronic method that allows for two-way communication is permissible in most circumstances. (Some agencies may be governed by laws which add requirements beyond those included in the Sunshine Act.)

However, any agency taking that step must provide a reasonably accessible method for the public to participate and comment pursuant to Section 710.1 of the Sunshine Act. That method should be clearly explained to the public in advance of and during the meeting. Further, the Office of Open Records strongly recommends that any agency holding such a meeting record the meeting and proactively make the recording available (preferably online) so that a full and complete record of the meeting is available to the public.

? **What help is available to our local businesses?** ☰

To help navigate through the potential financial impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Pennsylvania businesses, both the state and federal government are offering loans to help offset the revenue lost. [Financing programs](#) are available for businesses affected by COVID-19. We recommend that you continue to routinely check back on this webpage as additional information is added.

? **Where do we find accurate and up-to-date information for our community?** ☰

Be in contact with your county emergency coordinator and your regional health department for specific recommendations for your community.

The [Governor's Resource Page on Covid-19](#)

The [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#) is charged with the Commonwealth's response and is updating the situation status daily.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC)

[National Institutes of Health](#)

The Governor's Center for Local Government Services at 888.223.6837 OR ra-dcedclgs@pa.gov

Municipal officials should be aware that the Pennsylvania Secretary of Health and the Governor continue to carefully monitor this situation and issue frequent updates as the situation develops. Different steps may be needed in communities based on the level of outbreak, and you should remain in contact with your local and county emergency management coordinators.

? **Local political units were absent from the list. Should municipalities close down?** ☰

Local political units are not required to suspend in-person physical operations but should curtail in-person operations to the extent practicable and follow COVID-19 mitigation guidance provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the CDC. All decisions should appropriately balance public safety while ensuring the continued delivery of critical infrastructure services and functions.

? **How should municipalities and local governments exercise their enforcement authority in supporting the Governor's order?** ☰

The identified sectors in the list of [life-sustaining businesses](#) is not intended to be an authoritative or exhaustive list of critical infrastructure sectors and functions that should continue during the COVID-19 response. State and local officials should use best judgment in exercising their authority and issuing implementation directives and guidance. Visit the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) related to the Governor's Executive Order mandating the closures for COVID-19. Similarly, critical infrastructure industry partners must use best judgment, informed by the list and the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Critical Infrastructure Guidance](#), to ensure continued operations of critical infrastructure services and functions. All such decisions should appropriately balance public health and safety while ensuring the continued delivery of critical infrastructure services and functions.

? **Construction was classified as non-life-sustaining. Should all construction companies suspend in-person physical operations? Can a construction company continue projects related to road repair, road completion, flood mitigation, etc.?** ☰

Construction activities not clearly authorized under the DHS Guidance should suspend general operations but may maintain specific limited operations necessary to ensure compliance with federal, state, or local regulatory requirements.

? **May I complete my customer's residential construction project?** ☰

Residential construction projects that are substantially completed may continue to completion. For all other residential construction projects, limited activities may continue to the extent necessary to stabilize the site, temporarily prevent weather damage, or make emergency repairs only. Projects that are "substantially completed" are those projects that have been issued a final occupancy permit. No new residential construction projects may be started.