

Walz signs executive orders benefitting agriculture industry

Friday, April 24: Gov. Tim Walz today signed four executive orders to strengthen Minnesota's response to COVID-19.

Under current state law, receipt of COVID-19 relief payments may make individuals ineligible for certain human services programs. To alleviate economic hardship for Minnesotans, Executive Order 20-42 allows Minnesotans to obtain and maintain access to essential services regardless of whether they receive COVID-19 assistance.

Executive Order 20-43 allows shareholders for Minnesota companies flexibility related to virtual or telephone annual meetings, helping companies to avoid gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The agricultural industry and community face a significant challenges in getting their animals to market, especially with additional plant closures due to COVID-19. Executive Order 20-44 provides emergency relief from regulations for motor carriers and drivers operating in Minnesota in order to support the food supply chain, extending the provisions outlined in Executive Order 20-24 for transporting livestock, and additional exemptions in order to efficiently transport animal remains.

Executive Order 20-45 provides temporary relief to farmers by exempting motor carriers and drivers operating in Minnesota from certain weight-related regulations in order to efficiently transport wood and wood byproducts for use as composting material.

New COVID-19 website launched for Minnesota

Friday, April 24: As part of the state's effort to provide widespread, rapid COVID-19 testing, Gov. Tim Walz today unveiled a new website to help Minnesotans find a testing location within their community. "Access to COVID-19 testing is critical to moving Minnesota forward during this pandemic," Walz said. "This tool will help make our widespread testing initiative accessible to all Minnesotans, and it's a direct result of our partnership with the cutting-edge health care sector in Minnesota."

This testing collaborative now includes 127 clinics and health care facilities across the state. The new COVID-19 website provides easy access to Minnesotans' closest testing site, offers general information related to the COVID-19 outbreak, and provides an interactive screening tool to help Minnesotans determine if they need a test.

This interactive testing site allows the state to coordinate with local public health and tribal organizations that have strong connections to the communities they serve. "Aggressive and expanded testing is an essential part of our overall strategy to mitigate this pandemic," said health commissioner Jan Malcom. "As we strive to reach our goal of testing up to 20,000 people per day, we must do everything we can to expand access points across the state. This work is literally saving lives."

On Wednesday, April 22, Gov. Walz, representatives of the state's health care delivery systems, the Mayo Clinic, and the University of Minnesota announced a breakthrough for rapid, widespread testing of COVID-19 in Minnesota to test all symptomatic people, isolate confirmed cases, and expand public health surveillance tools. By building capacity to test as many as 20,000 Minnesotans per day, this increased testing and tracing will support the state's response to the pandemic and the safe re-opening of society.

MSHSL cancels spring 2019-20 athletics, activities

Thursday, April 23: In response to Executive Order 20-41 issued today by Gov. Tim Walz, the Minnesota State High School League, under direction of its board of directors, has declared, effective immediately, all activities and athletics for the spring season have been cancelled for the 2019-20 school year. The decision of the MSHSL is aligned with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Minnesota Department of Health and is in support of practices that focus on community health and safety.

"As a parent of a high school senior, I understand the tremendous impact of this pandemic," said board president Bonnie Spohn Schmaltz of Eden Valley-Watkins. "As a speech coach, team members that I have coached since seventh grade won't see their final season culminating with the opportunity at the state tournament, including my daughter. Knowing these costs, I'm proud of the sacrifices competitors and coaches throughout the state are making to keep others safe."

The cancellation applies to all forms of student participation in any MSHSL activity, athletics, and fine arts. The section and state tournaments for each of the MSHSL's spring activities are also cancelled. This cancellation applies to adapted bowling, adapted softball, badminton, baseball, clay target, golf, lacrosse, music, robotics, softball, speech, synchronized swimming, tennis, track and field, and visual arts.

MSHSL activities and athletics for the spring season have been suspended since Sunday, March 15.

"I can understand how heartbreaking the cancellation of the spring sports and activities season is for our students," said board member Troy Stein, the activities director at Edina High School. "Many of our students and families spend the entire year preparing for their season. Sports and activities are about so much more than the competitions and performances. They provide students with a sense of accomplishment, purpose and belonging. They also provide the community an opportunity to gather and rally around their school. Without that, I think it is fair to say we all feel a sense of loss."

The MSHSL will continue to communicate with and assist member schools during the cancellation of these athletics and fine arts activities. Its board of directors will hold its regular board meeting on Friday, April 24, via digital communication to further discuss ways to work with member schools as they complete the academic year and look toward next year.

"This difficult decision was one we had hoped we would not need to make," executive director Erich Martens said. "Our activities and athletics offer so much to so many students and their school communities, and we thank all who work to provide these amazing opportunities for students. We also value the incredible benefits of strong and supportive connections between students and their coaches and advisors, and our hope is that these will continue even during this time when they are

not able to participate or meet face to face."

"Our work will continue in providing leadership and guidance for our member schools and will soon turn to the summer and planning for a return to participation this fall," added Martens. "At this time, everything we can do to slow the spread and impacts of COVID-19 will help ensure the health of all, and will most certainly increase the chances that programming for students can return."

The MSHSL strongly encourages all students, coaches, advisors, officials, and administrators to adhere to all aspects of the current stay-at-home order and participate fully in all recommended safety practices, including social distancing, hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and limiting unnecessary contact with others. With the increasing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals, communities, and states, and in full support of the recommendation of the CDC, the MDH, and all executive orders by Gov. Tim Walz, all Minnesotans must actively work to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Here is background information and the timeline of MSHSL decisions and declarations:

Thursday, March 12 – The MSHSL cancels the adapted floor hockey state tournament and announces the cancellation of the consolation rounds of the girls basketball state tournament. The MSHSL also issues a directive that the remaining championship rounds of the girls basketball state tournament will be conducted with a specific number of spectators.

Friday, March 13 – The MSHSL cancels the remainder of the girls basketball state tournament. All boys basketball section tournament games are cancelled, as is the state tournament (scheduled for March 18-21). The section speech tournament events (March 15-21) are postponed indefinitely. In a communication to member schools, the MSHSL shares participation limitations that extend to Monday, April 6, that limit participation to practice and tryouts only.

Sunday, March 15 – In accordance with emergency Executive Order 20-02 issued by Gov. Tim Walz, the MSHSL updates participation limitations that there will be no participation in any athletic or fine arts activities through Friday, March 27. The previous directive prohibiting scrimmages, contests, and competitions continues through Monday, April 6.

Tuesday, March 17 – The MSHSL issues updated spring participation limitations to guide participants, administrators, and coaches during the suspension of activities.

Wednesday, March 25 – Gov. Tim Walz issues a stay-at-home order and closes Minnesota schools until Monday, May 4. The MSHSL alerts member schools that all spring activities are suspended until at least that date.

Thursday, April 23 – With Gov. Walz extending "distance learning" through the end of the 2019-20 school year, the MSHSL cancels all spring athletics and activities for 2019-20.