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Pa. calls for statewide shutdown of nonessential businesses

By Sam Ruland York Daily Record

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Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf provides an update on the new coronavirus on Thursday.

Associated Press

Following the lead of governors in New York and New Jersey, Gov. Tom Wolf is calling for a mass shutdown of bars, restaurants and nonessential businesses in Pennsylvania starting Monday night.

He clarified that this is not a mandate and that businesses will not be forced to close.

“This isn’t a decision I take lightly at all,” Wolf said during a news conference Monday. “It is one I am taking because medical experts believe it is the only way we can prevent our hospitals from being overwhelmed by patients.”

“Effective at midnight, all nonessential stores are to close in Pennsylvania, as well as bars and restaurants, except for takeout,” Wolf said.

Wolf’s call for these businesses to close comes as part of a series of steps the state is taking to fight the spread of coronavirus. On Monday, the state added 13 confirmed cases of COVID-19 to bring the total to 76.

Bars and restaurants need to limit themselves to takeout and delivery, the governor said, stressing that this approach is necessary to prevent people from traveling to seek amenities.

This includes day programs for seniors, and Wolf also called for day care facilities to close, but said they will not be forced to do so.

Groceries, gas stations, pharmacies and some other essential businesses are not being told to close.

“At this time, I anticipate this to continue for two weeks, but we will constantly be reevaluating and lift the mitigation efforts as soon as possible,” Wolf said.

State officials previously clarified that nonessential businesses include community, recreation and senior centers; gyms, including yoga, barre and spin facilities; hair salons, nail salons and spas; casinos; concert venues; theaters; bars; sporting event venues and golf courses; retail facilities, including shopping malls except for pharmacy or other health care facilities within retail operations.

The shutdown will begin at midnight Monday and remain in effect until further notice. Additionally, the governor has discouraged gatherings of 50 or more people. At this time, there are also no plans in place to order a curfew, but Wolf urged people to stay home as much as possible.

“We need limit as much physical contact as we can,” Wolf said. “We’re not sending out the state police or National Guard to enforce this. This is not your government mandating anything.”

All schools in Pennsylvania are also closed for at least two weeks, Wolf announced Friday.

“Flattening the curve” — or spreading out the number of cases of the coronavirus over a longer period — will alleviate the stress on the health care system. The fast-spreading virus surged quickly in China and Italy.

