



Governor Northam's Briefing: Friday, April 24, 2020

- General Assembly reconvened and took many positive actions, including a workshare program, minimum wage increase, eviction prevention and mortgage protection. Also funding for nursing homes.
- Virginians shouldn't have to choose between their health and their right to vote.
 - Governor had recommended moving the May election to November. Thanked House for agreeing, but disappointed in Senate for not accepting his recommendation.
 - By Executive Order, Governor has moved Election to May 19, as allowed by the Virginia Constitution.
 - Encouraged to vote absentee by mail.
 - Using volunteers from the medical corps to put PPE at polls and extra safety measures for the workers.
- Last week 82k filed for unemployment, but we are the tenth lowest state for unemployed percentage. More than 50k are gig workers and should get benefits next week. Worked with Microsoft and Virginia Interactive to upgrade unemployment system online and they did a great job increasing capacity.
- Extended ban on elective surgery to May 12.
- When we begin to gradually reopen, follow CDC Guidelines for Phase One. To get there we have:
 - Restricted businesses, closed schools and told people to stay home.
 - Controlled the spread and kept counts low. Our case count is growing at a low rate and the hospitalizations are flat.
 - 1,600 patients have been treated successfully and discharged.
 - Ordered decontamination machines to clean PPE.
- To move into Phase One:
 - Downward percentage of positive tests over 14 days.
 - Social distancing and telework continue.
 - Keep wearing face coverings.
 - Some businesses will open with strict safety restrictions.
 - Hospitalizations trending down for 14 days.
 - Increased testing and tracing.
 - Follow CDC guidelines that President announced.
 - Dr. Remley, Testing Taskforce Director: testing strategy is moving from step one to two, which is 5,000 tests per day and expanded to testing strike teams and national guard (stage two), stages range from 1 (symptomatic) to 5 (ongoing monitoring).
- Business task force gathered to safely reopen businesses in Virginia. Prioritize public health and build confidence.

Q & A

Q: When will you be doing enough tests to begin reopening?

A: Don't have an exact date, but 10,000 tests daily is our goal. First case tested six weeks ago by the CDC, since then we've increased to now testing over 4,000 today. The tests were so cumbersome at first, (couldn't get materials or complete in the office, waiting up to 9 days for results) that many physicians weren't testing. As soon as we can get there we will.

Q: What is the current capacity of the state lab?

Now able to do 400-500 tests per day. Plus we are coordinating with VCU, UVA and Va Tech which are testing too. We're coordinating for more aggressive testing, as well as faster tests with private labs.

Q: Some parts of Virginia are more densely populated and have higher numbers of cases, so do we plan to reopen regionally?

A: Our plans to date are not to open one region before others. Businesses are still closed for two weeks. On May 1 resume elective surgeries. Phase one possibly by May 8 but certainly not before that.

Q: The prospective candidates who are trying to collect signatures to qualify to be on the ballot, are having trouble collecting signatures with everything shut down. Will the rules change?

A: Candidates have a June 9 deadline to turn in their petitions. We're hopeful that restrictions will be lifted in time for them to be able to get all their signatures to get on the ballot.

Q: Some individuals in Virginia have put out a statement that we should ease up on the guidelines. How do you respond to that?

A: We are using CDC guidelines put out by our President. We have been trying to make our decisions by using science and data. We're continuing to follow those guidelines and will move through the phases as we meet the expectations.

Q: Some people had their utilities shut off prior to crisis. Can work with them to get their utilities turned back on?

A: If there are families out there with those issues, they should go to our website and we will do everything can to remedy that situation.

Q: What has the business response been?

A: We've been working with the new business task force and the VDH as well as other businesses not on the task force. We've had a great response from businesses so far, we are creating consistency and clarity on what to do. This is driven by consumers and customers. When they feel safe enough to go back into businesses then we will respond.

Q: How might NoVa be influenced by the timeline of MD and DC reopening?

A: We're neighbors and in daily communication with those leaders. Our goal is to be as consistent as possible. Every state and city are a little bit different, but we will try our best to be as consistent as possible moving forward.

Q: Please expand on contact tracing, how will that be done?

A: As we begin to move forward, we will increase contact tracing with our medical reserve corps and other volunteers. We will also use some applications to help with that, but that will take human intervention and not just electronic tracing. We expect that to be ready sometime in May. This afternoon we have a call with Apple to discuss possible tools for Virginia.

Q: Emphasized absentee voting, will deadline for that be extended?

A: Yes, request a ballot by May 12 and turn it in by May 19 (Election Day).

Q: Expect case counts to rise?

A: Yes, as we're seeing testing numbers rise, so will cases.

- Work is being done now to get more PPE, increase testing etc., moving toward an open economy. This will be consumer driven, and in time people will become more comfortable and make sure businesses are doing everything they can to safeguard customers – to make them as comfortable and safe as possible. Thanks to everyone who are working to keep Virginians safe. Also thanks to everyone on his team in Virginia and asks that we thank everyone we see working. A thank you goes a long way.