

Governor Ducey on COVID-19 with ADHS Director Dr. Cara Christ

Phoenix, AZ

Wednesday, March 11th 2020 at Arizona State Public Health Laboratory

Key Points

- Governor Ducey gave an update this afternoon regarding COVID-19 (coronavirus) with the Arizona Department of Health Services Director Dr. Cara Christ.
- Governor Ducey has declared an executive order to hinder price gouging for medical supplies, help the prevention of spreading the virus in health care facilities, and insurance providers to cover full costs of testing.
- \$12 million has been issued to Arizona for continued prevention efforts
- There are 9 official cases in Arizona

Governor Ducey: Thank you for joining us here today. I am here with the Health Services Director, the Director of Emergency Management, Arizona Director of AARP and Arizona Health Care Association.

This week we have focused on protecting public health as our top priority. When it comes to COVID-19, we followed facts and the advice from top health professionals: The Department of Health Services, the CDC and the World Health Organization.

This morning the department of health services announced the finding of three additional presumptive cases of COVID-19 bringing the Arizona total to 9.

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Our approach has been calm, steady, and transparent to act with urgency to protect public health. This approach allowed Arizona to be certified by the CDC to test for COVID-19. We have been having regular briefings, webinars and providing guidance to community stakeholders (business leaders, schools, government officials).

We have coordinated closely with experts on the ground including hospitals, care facilities, and local health officials. Their input has guided our actions and we are grateful for their partnerships.

While Arizona is not currently facing the number of cases other states are, we are anticipating additional positive cases and not taking any chances. This is about public health and protecting lives. Especially those of our elderly and most vulnerable.

Today I am taking official actions to remain ahead of the virus. I am declaring a declaration of public health emergency. This allow the state to quickly tap in resources when needed to combat the virus. This allows the state to waive license requirements of health officials for additional services during heightened demand. Provides hospital and health care facilities, such as nursing homes the flexibility to enhance services and safety protocols. This is a proactive measure and ensures Dr. Chris and her team will have everything they will need.

The second action comes from discussions with health care professionals and providers. It is an Executive Order to protect those most at risk, elderly citizens and those with underlying health conditions. It requires nursing homes and assisted living facilities to implement visitor policies and enhanced symptoms checks. This will help to continue those to visit their loved ones and protect those most at risk. It requires insurance companies and health plans to cover out of network providers for testing. It includes laboratories and telemedicine for COVID-19 testing. It requires protecting consumers of price gouging for testing. It requires insurance companies to cover 100% of testing.

You may ask why now and why today.

Here is why. This is an important proactive action. We have not had spread at nursing homes or health care facilities, but we could. If that happens, we want DHS to be able to act immediately and with urgency. We know more can be done right now to protect at risk populations and this is what the Executive Order does.

These are our latest steps and will not be our last steps. Nothing here today should be misinterpreted. These are proactive measures to limit community spread.

To our citizens, continue to follow health services guild lines from our health services at AZhealth.gov. We will continue our approach to be calm and study. We will find facts in timely and transparent manner. We need help of our community leaders to make sure all Arizonans know the risk and facts.

Now I am going to hand it over to Dr. Christ.

Dr. Cara Christ, Director of Arizona Department of Health Services:

Thank you for your leadership and making the health of the communities your administrations top priority. I am grateful for our partnership and working with community stakeholders.

My team has been working nonstop in response to COVID-19 and making sure we are keeping our communities and families safe. We are monitoring all actives to make data driven decisions that protect our communities.

I want to thank Governor Ducey for taking swift action with his declaration and Executive order to provide health professionals and administrators with the tools that are necessary to combat the virus and reduce financial burdens on Arizonians.

Today the Center for Disease Control and Prevention will get \$12.4 million dollars for the public health response of COVID-19. This is in addition to the \$500,000 we have already received.

I want to provide the latest info that we have about the spread of COVID-19 in Arizona. We have had 9 cases in total. Two have been confirmed by the CDC and others are presumptive cases that are pending confirmation from CDC. We do count them as cases in the state and are taking actions based on results.

There are three cases in Maricopa County, five in Pinal County, and one in Pima County. For specific information you can go to the County public health departments.

We have community spread of the virus and are expecting more. We want to mitigate the spread and lower impact of those at risk the most from complications from virus. There is a heightened level of risk where it has been detected. The highest risk is those that are older adults and those with serious underlying conditions. Those at high risk should be prepared. They should have supplies on hand with extra prescribed medications, over the counter medications, and household items. They should take everyday precautions by washing hands for twenty seconds, disinfecting commonly touched areas, and avoid people that are sick. They should also stay away from large crowds. Those at risk should have a plan if they get sick and identify who else can take care of them. To stop the spread of COVID-19 you should routinely implement infection measures. Make sure to Wash hands for twenty seconds, avoid touching eyes nose and mouth, avoid close contact with those that are sick, cover cough or sneezes with tissues, and disinfect commonly touched areas.

People that they think they may be infected should consider using telemedicine if that is an option. The public health departments are great for updates and information that you can find up to date and factual information.

I want to assure everyone that we are prepared to respond to the spread of COVID-19 and will provide the public with the most up to date information.

Dana Kennedy the Arizona Director of AARP:

I am not an expert in this field, but I am an expert in aging and our health care system. Just reading about what has happened in Washington I am mortified at what has happened and why.

I am honored that the Governor and Dr. Christ have been taking swift action and working with the community. I have cleared my calendar to give input and be a community leader and prevent what has happened in Washington from happening here.

AZ Health Care Association Director:

Thank you to the teams for all of their hard work and collaboration on this effort. It is unique being in this situation and having the collaboration with everyone. We represent skilled nursing facilities and we want to keep COVID-19 out of the facilities. The senior population is at risk and many are in skilled facilities. If we have the virus enter the building that will be our biggest issue. We want to keep COVID-19 out of our buildings.

The second step is to contain it with the help of the Governor and DHS to limit visitations and take steps now that are needed. I also want to thank providers and those dealing with this at the front lines. We couldn't do it without them. I truly appreciate what they have done.

Q & A

One of the patients identified is a 90-year-old patient. You said there were proactive steps to protect these folks. What is being done on state level to find out how they got the virus and where?

Dr. Christ: Maricopa County is investigating how to identify how they got exposed and where the source is. They will work with the providers for appropriate monitoring and protocols for the patients.

We are getting calls from angry Arizonans that they want the test, but can't get one.

Dr. Christ: We would encourage that if you don't have symptoms you don't need to be tested. For those that think they have symptoms, they should go to urgent care or their personal health care provider. We will be working with providers so they know that they have these options and know steps for testing.

Washington State put a ban on gathering of over 250 people. Are you considering doing the same?

Dr. Christ: We are not recommending cancelling mass gatherings right now. We are working with the CDC on new guidance for when we are at that point and we would do that.

If we have community spread wouldn't we want to do that?

Dr. Christ: We are not at widespread community transmission right now

What would you say to those worried about missing out on a pay check from this virus?

Gov Ducey: If someone is sick or has a temperature they should not go to work. I know many businesses are updating their policies for employees that are sick and coming to work.

How many test kits are available and will the Executive Order change the rate we are getting them in?

Dr. Christ: The order will not impact how many kits we get. We originally got 225 tests for samples.

Where does the \$12 million go and have you done modeling to get a sense of how big the virus outbreak will be?

Dr. Christ: For your first question, the funding will go to contracts to local and tribal health departments for boots on the groundwork. We will also be using it here for our staff, and lab testing, and PSAs to give most up to date announcements. We have partnered with TGEN and they are getting samples that are negative for flu and respiratory infections which will get forwarded to them and they will do COVID-19 testing and tell us the results of the testing and the genetic testing to monitor what is going on.

President Trump said that the other day if you want a test you can get it

Gov Ducey: If you are symptomatic and part of the vulnerable population you can get it.