

# CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

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## **Legislature Launches Coronavirus Response Committee**

In preparation for a Special Session later this spring, a Joint — House and Senate — Coronavirus Response Committee met to begin prioritizing what the state can do to help individuals and businesses faced with this unprecedented public health crisis.

The committee is looking at relief options in four broad categories:

1. Housing – including rental and mortgage assistance, and a moratorium on evictions
2. Food Assistance – streamlining programs like Food Stamps (SNAP)
3. Business and Economic Preservation – including easing red tape for unemployment insurance, possibly delaying the start of the new Corporate Activity Tax and making cash available, especially to small businesses.
4. Health Care – where they are particularly concerned with hospital capacity and the shortage of personal protection equipment and supplies

Their goal is to supplement federal resources that may be coming.

Some of the most startling information came from the hotel and restaurant industry. New data shows the impact on hotel bookings and job losses from the coronavirus is already greater than the 2008 Recession and 9/11 combined.

- One hotel group saw revenues decline by \$1.7 million in the last 10 days.
- 20 conventions planned in Portland have been cancelled.
- As of March 16, the number of people eating in Oregon restaurants is down 61% from a year ago.
- McMenamin's closed its hotels and restaurants laying off 3,000 people.
- Travel Portland estimates a loss of \$67 million in reservations.

The Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association said state assistance is essential because, "Small businesses that go out of business, aren't going to be there to help with the recovery."

Oregon Health Authority director Pat Allen said health care providers are facing a critical shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE). Allen said the state:

- Had 590,000 N95 respirators but has already used 20%
- Has used two-thirds of the 49,000 surgical masks that were available.
- Has used 83% of the surgical gowns in stock.

"We are going to run out of PPE," Allen said. "We will have medical providers who have to treat patients without the masks and gowns that are needed."

Allen said they recognize that steps already taken are having a huge impact on businesses and families. "As single-mindedly hard this is for the economy, it is all focused on driving down demand for health care so we don't exceed our hospital capacity."

The Coronavirus Response Committee plans to meet again on Friday and twice weekly after that to prepare budget and statute recommendations for a Special Session. A date for that Special Session is not yet set.

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