

Evers directs DHS to close K-12 schools starting Wednesday

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Gov. Tony Evers Friday directed the Department of Health Services to close all K-12 schools — public and private — beginning Wednesday and stretching through at least April 6 as part of the state's response to the coronavirus outbreak.

In his [announcement](#), Evers said the reopening date could be pushed back pending further information.

Evers' announcement came as districts across the state began making decisions on their own to close their doors in response to the outbreak. The mandate begins at the close of the school day Wednesday to allow districts time to prepare, and Evers noted districts may close earlier if they choose.

"Closing our schools is not a decision I made lightly, but keeping our kids, our educators, our families, and our communities safe is a top priority as we continue our work to respond to and prevent further spread of COVID-19 in Wisconsin," Evers said.

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Wisconsin is at least the 10th state to order schools closed statewide. The other states are: Ohio, Illinois, Maryland, Oregon, New Mexico, Michigan, West Virginia, Virginia and Louisiana. Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear has also recommended closing all schools in that state.

Earlier Friday, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services reported 11 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the state's total to 19 cases, including one individual who has recovered.

Fond du Lac County has the most cases of any county with six confirmed cases,

while Dane County has five, Sheboygan County has three, Milwaukee County has two, and Racine, Pierce and Waukesha counties each have one case.

The order came after Department of Health Services Secretary Andrea Palm Thursday pledged that schools “will remain open using tools and tactics so that they can continue to do the essential functions.”

Evers also said Thursday that K-12 schools would operate “in a way that minimizes large groups of kids being together” in order to slow the spread of the virus.

The gov said part of his concern with closing schools was that the move would have an effect on food security.

The Department of Public Instruction has filed a [waiver request](#) with the federal government that would allow it to continue serving meals to eligible students during the school closures.

Following Evers’ Friday announcement, Department of Public Instruction Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor said that schools are “thinking about the anticipated academic and economic impacts, and unintended impacts of these decisions, and are planning for ways to provide critical supports to kids and families, such as food and security.”