

Governor Phil Murphy

Audio and Rush Transcript: Amid Lack of Federal Direction, Governor Murphy, Governor Cuomo, and Governor Lamont Announce Regional Approach to Combatting COVID-19

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Amid a lack of federal direction and nationwide standards, earlier today New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, and Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont today announced a regional approach to combatting the novel coronavirus - or COVID-19 - throughout the tri-state area.

These uniform standards will limit crowd capacity for social and recreational gatherings to 50 people, effective 8 PM tonight. This follows updated guidance that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued yesterday recommending the cancellation or postponement of in-person events consisting of 50 people or more.

The three governors also announced restaurants and bars will close for on premise service and move to take-out and delivery services only. These establishments will be provided a waiver for carry-out alcohol. These measures will take effect at 8 PM tonight.

Finally, the three governors said they will temporarily close movie theaters, gyms and casinos, effective at 8 PM tonight.

This uniform approach to social distancing is meant to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19.

AUDIO of their conference call is available here (<https://soundcloud.com/nygovcuomo/governor-cuomo-hosts-conference-call>).

A rush transcript of the conference call is available below:

Governor Cuomo: Thank you all very much for joining us and thank you for joining us on short notice. It's my true pleasure to be with my colleagues Governor Phil Murphy of New Jersey and Governor Ned Lamont of Connecticut.

We work very well together, we've had a lot of good outings together with Governor Lamont up to Lake Ontario. We went fishing he promised he was going to return the favor. I've heard nothing from Governor Lamont since then. With Governor Murphy, I'll give you an idea - the striped bass is starting to come up. They're going to pass New Jersey first so if you have an inkling you have a ready, willing and able fishing partner.

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But I tell you the truth - I've been in this position a number of years and I'm really blessed to have Governor Lamont and Governor Murphy as my colleagues. There is no doubt especially today with what's going on that when states can work together well it makes all the difference in the world.

With this coronavirus I think it's fair to say that we need the federal government to do a better job than they have been doing and this is my opinion. The federal government has to step up. They have been behind from day one on this crisis. We knew this was happening in China back in November. That we are surprised in March and still scrambling to get testing in place and getting a health care system in place is inexcusable, and states frankly don't have the capacity or the power to make up for the federal government. So we're doing the best we can but we really need the federal government to do what it's supposed to be doing.

There are two areas that I think the federal government should be most helpful. On closings to reduce density, you watch the national news today and it's a hodgepodge of different actions by different states and different cities all across the country. Different places taking different actions.

And secondly, in hospital capacity where we're going to have a real problem is when these cases hit their apex and descend on the healthcare system and we will not have enough hospital beds, period. I sent the president a letter saying we need the Army Corps of Engineers to come in here now to start building temporary healthcare capacity. In the meantime, we do what we can as states on density reduction policies, and coming up with the same rules for closings is imperative. In New York State, my state, like Governor Murphy's state and Governor Lamont's state, I'm in charge of my state so I make sure all the rules are the same in my state. New York City can't do anything different than Nassau County or Suffolk County or Westchester County because if that happens people will just shop among the different locales. You close a bar in Nassau but you leave it open in New York city all you're doing is having people drive from Nassau County to New York City, which is the last thing we want to do. It's also true among states. If I take certain actions, or Governor Lamont takes certain actions, we're all in the same area, any one of our residents can get in the car and just drive to the neighboring state to do whatever they want to do. So we have agreed to a common set of rules that will pertain in all of our states so don't even think about going to a neighboring state because there's going to be a different set of conditions.

I believe that we are the only region in the country that has done this and I applaud Governor Murphy and Governor Lamont for that. As I said before, I think the federal government should have set up a uniform set of rules but absent that having regional coordination at a minimum is imperative and that's what we're doing today. We all agree that there will be no crowds with gatherings of over 50 people so if you can't do a party in New York City, you can't do a party in New Jersey, you can't do a party in Connecticut over 50. The casinos, which we all have, will close at 8pm tonight, gyms will close at 8 p.m. tonight, movie theaters will close at 8pm tonight. And bars and restaurants will close at 8 p.m. tonight and will only offer takeout services.

I want to thank, again, my colleagues for their cooperation and their foresight. It's not easy to get states on the same page. It sort of runs against the normal jurisdictional orientation. But Governor Lamont and Governor Murphy realized that this is not the normal times. And in extraordinary times, extraordinary leaders step up to the plate.

Governor Lamont and Governor Murphy are extraordinary leaders, in my opinion, and I'm blessed to have them as my colleagues and my friends.

Governor Murphy: Governor Cuomo, Phil Murphy here. Thank you so much for your comments and would say the same thing right back to you. I would echo many of the things you said, including, I don't know if there are any three governors in the country right now who are harmonizing and coordinating as much as the three of us are, and I think that is a good thing and can hopefully set an example. In fact, I do back and forth exchanges with our good friend and colleague Tom Wolf of Pennsylvania, to New Jersey's west, and I hope that we can mimic a similar harmony there.

I have said several times over the past number of days in our state, and I know this goes for all three of our states, we are going to get through this. We are going to get through this as one family - in our case one Jersey family. We will get through it all doing our part. It is undeniable that we have many good friends and

neighbors in our case in New York and Connecticut, beginning with the two of you guys. We are all in this together. And folks know this, but let's remind everybody that the work against this coronavirus isn't just up to some of us. It has got to be up to all of us. And that by the way includes the members of the media, who have been on this call, to keep people informed with facts. I know my fellow governors join me in thanking them for their diligence.

Later today, we are going to go into a lot more detail on the Jersey agenda. Again, a lot this is harmonized with New York and Connecticut, and again I want to thank Governor Cuomo and Governor Lamont. I'll be announcing our plans for closing our schools and institutions of higher education. That is a big step but it is just part of a broader effort to encourage the so-called social distancing and get residents to stay home and play their role in slowing the spread of illness - the so-called flattening of that curve. In addition, again Governor Cuomo alluded to a lot of this and a lot of this is in harmony across our three states. All non-essential travel and non-emergency travel in Jersey is strongly discouraged beginning tonight at 8 p.m. until 5 a.m. each day. This will remain in effect for the foreseeable future. We want everybody to remain at home not out. Businesses that will play a direct role in our response efforts, are necessary for the public welfare and you all can figure out who they are - supermarkets, grocery stores, pharmacies, medical offices, gas stations, etcetera, among a very limited list. They'll be able to stay open until after 8 p.m. After 8 p.m. all non-essential businesses must close and then during the daytime hours, as Governor Cuomo alluded to, businesses may remain open if they limit their occupancy to no more than 50 persons and adhere social distancing guidelines.

All bars and restaurants across our states are closed for eat-in services. Eat-in services effective 8 p.m. tonight. After 8 p.m. these establishments may open for takeout and delivery orders only again until further notice. All movie theaters, gym, casinos and racetracks, again as Governor Cuomo has alluded to, will also close. I'll give more details on the Jersey specifics later on this afternoon. Online gaming by the way will continue.

As Governor Cuomo also said all public events with 50 or more persons are cancelled effective 8:00 p.m. tonight and we can't say this enough that everyone needs to stay in and be safe. Just because you don't feel sick and this is a particular shutout to our young people, it doesn't mean you aren't carrying the virus. The last thing anyone should be thinking about is going out and potentially spreading the disease.

As I mentioned we got a lot of specific steps in New Jersey that I'll be speaking to the media in a few hours and after I get my full overnight briefing from our health commissioner and public safety team.

Again you're known by the company you keep. I couldn't be in better company than with Governor Andrew Cuomo and Governor Ned Lamont. I thank them for their partnership and their own leadership in their own states and again their cooperation in getting through this emergency and again if we all do our part, each and every one of us, we will get through this and we'll get stronger. We'll have the strongest region in the country if not the world.

With that we turn things over to Connecticut, Governor and friend Ned Lamont.

Governor Lamont: Phil and Andrew, thank you, and as you say Phil, we are in this together and we are in it together not as towns, cities, states but now increasingly as a region and that's what Governor Cuomo emphasized so much. We went there fishing in Lake Ontario about seven or eight months ago - we talked just about everything but COVID-19 was not on the horizon at that point. This is changing so fast that we've got to work together on a coordinated basis to make sure this is how we go. I've got to say we had New Rochelle and Westchester and a lot of the infections start there, came right through Fairfield County. That is a region and this is a virus that knows no borders and that's what we're trying to do. The first region in the state to work together on such a coordinated basis, as Governor Cuomo said.

I'm looking around the rest of the states and the rest of the countries in terms of what we can learn and I've seen - you look overseas, you look at [11:14], Hong Kong, in Asia, where they really have strong, forceful social-distancing measures and how they were able to flatten that curve and to save hundreds of thousands

of lives. We also look at Italy and France where it's a freer society. Perhaps they weren't able to be quite as forceful. I think you see what's going on there and the epidemic and as Governor Cuomo said, it's overwhelming the hospital situation. So, this is why we've got to work together on a united basis and give people that sense of urgency that we're doing what we can. I noticed pictures of Disneyworld yesterday, packed until they closed it last night. Many of our bars and even restaurants were busy just this past weekend and that's why we're stepping forward in a very clear, demonstrative way to say we're going to work on this together on a unified regional basis. As Phil said, if you have any option at all, stay home. If you're over 60, 70, stay home. If your grandchild wants to visit you, stay home and say you're going to learn to FaceTime because these are the folks who are, by far, the most vulnerable.

I've got to say, in terms of our restaurants, we're think long and hard in terms of takeout as a way that we can support them. We have a lot of people who are buying gift certificates. They're not going to go to the restaurant this week or next month, but we're doing everything we can that they can keep going. As we close down the last of our schools by the end of the day, we're thinking long and hard about folks with free and reduced lunches. We're keeping those cafeterias open and making sure we have pick up service there so people don't have to go without their meals.

We're working very hard in terms of daycare prioritizing our public health workers, and those that have to be at work, say public safety as well, and making sure those folks know that their kids are taken care of so they can take care of us. Something I'd like to work on with Phil and Andrew, we're working with online scholastic folks and we're going to have a free service available to all those kids who are home from school, so that we can at least maintain some semblance of education and also give them added reasons why they oughtn't to be out on the streets, but at home. And I just cannot repeat what both Phil and Andrew said, we'd better work through this together. The feds have been asleep at the switch, they've been slow off the trawl, we're the ones trying to figure out how to add capacity for our hospitals, we're the ones trying to make sure we have necessary ventilators and masks. If we do this on a regional basis, we're going to get through it. I found one story sort of hopeful, that was when Apple closed down all their stores in China some months ago. And we said what the heck's going on? And just recently they closed down all their stores in the United States. The thing maybe you noticed is China, they started opening their stores just last week. This things made me think we have the chance to slowly get back to normal if you're cautious about it. And if you're working to get through this you have to work together, but we cannot take our eye off the ball and I think standing together with my fellow governors is the right way to proceed. Back to you, Andrew.

Governor Cuomo: Thank you. Thank you governor. And as you well said, and I think your point is profound, you look at the history, the faster and better societies close down, the sooner they reopen. So that's a word to the wise. Just a point of clarification, when we say these facilities close down at 8 p.m. tonight, they will then remain closed until further notice, and the governor Phil Murphy, Governor Lamont and myself will be talking about the opening date to see if we can also coordinate the opening date.

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