



Mayor Brindle's COVID-19 Update March 31, 2020



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As of today, there are 18,696 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey. Today, I am saddened to report the third fatality in Westfield, a 62 year-old male, whose family we will surely all keep in our thoughts during this extremely difficult time.

This brings the official total from the Board of Health to 39 cases in Westfield. For a more detailed breakdown of statewide numbers, visit the [NJ Department of Health COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

SOCIAL DISTANCING

Today, I want to spend some time addressing the need for additional changes we are making to further promote social distancing compliance. We are now two weeks into a stay at home order that is, by all accounts, going to be a much longer haul at this rate.

Unfortunately, there seems to be a sense of complacency coming into play as some folks may think the worst is over when, in fact, all indications are that the worst is yet to come.

Every day, I am inundated with emails and pictures from residents who are concerned about the lack of social distancing adherence by their neighbors. Many of these emails are from doctors or their spouses

who are trying to reconcile their traumatic COVID hospital experiences with what they are witnessing in their neighborhoods.

While many good hearted neighbors are organizing birthday/celebratory drive bys for their now-distant friends, these events may still attract bystanders in close proximity on foot or on bikes, which is in violation of Governor Murphy's stay at home order. I recognize the importance of these gestures to raise spirits and stay connected; however, all participants should stay in their cars, or on their own property with family members only!

Such was the case with the Washington School parade yesterday, about which I received several comments from residents who were concerned about the lack of social distance compliance, in spite of best efforts by most families to maintain appropriate distancing. While I can appreciate the good intentions of the organizers to bring a smile to the faces of these now remote students, I certainly would have discouraged the parade if asked, so as not to encourage families to congregate along the route.

I also continue to hear about increasingly large groups of teenagers gathering in the various parking lots. I am concerned that, with spring break and better weather upon us next week, the potential for large group gatherings will only increase.

Additionally, appropriate social distancing has become almost impossible in our crowded parks on nice days. While we have closed the playgrounds, fields, and public restrooms in our parks, we are striving to keep our parks open so that residents have a place to enjoy some outdoor activity.

NEW RESTRICTIONS

To address these concerns, we will be adding the following additional restrictions, effective 5:00PM on Friday:

- Closure of the tennis courts at Memorial Park, Tamaques Park and Elm St. fields
- Closure of all basketball courts
- Closure of all parks to vehicular traffic and parking
- Closure of all school parking lots

Our parks will remain open for walking, running, bicycling, and taking in nature, as I continue to strongly believe that these spaces provide our community with a tremendous benefit during these unprecedented times. However, by eliminating cars, we hope to discourage ongoing group gatherings in any of those locations. I'd like to thank Dr. Dolan for her support in having this apply to all Westfield Public School properties as well.

ENFORCEMENT

I want to remind everyone that enforcement is a partnership between the community and our Police Department. In the last ten days alone, the WPD has conducted well over 300 documented compliance checks of various locations in Town (restaurants, parks, schools, etc.) -- that's more than 30 per day. That is in addition to having an officer assigned to Tamaques Park from 8:00AM until dark, every day, weather permitting. These checks are of course on top of the ongoing daily responsibilities of the department and the incremental assistance they are offering to residents and senior citizens in need at this time.

Chief Battiloro and his team are doing their part, and we need all of you to do yours as well by serving as social distance ambassadors. If you're concerned with something you see, take it upon yourself to address it. Please do not resort to public shaming through posting photos of residents on social media to point out presumed social distancing violations. Most of us are doing the best we can, and this public approach is simply not helpful when we're trying to come together as a community.

CONSERVATION CENTER

I know many of you are anxious to have the Conservation Center open for your spring yard cleaning and recycling initiatives. While many think this can be done without violating social distancing protocols, this is not considered essential business by the State. The Town's facilities, including Town Hall, the Public Works building, and the Conservation Center, were ordered to be closed to the public by the Governor. We have placed an inquiry with the State to determine if we will be permitted to open the Center, but have not yet received a response, so it will remain closed until further notice.

In parallel, we are taking this time to plan on how to best reconfigure the layout, traffic pattern, and annual permit process in a way that will be safe and manageable for the DPW and residents, in the event we obtain the approval to open. I look forward to the day when we can open the Center -- but depositing your items there is currently contrary to New Jersey's stay at home order. Curbside trash removal and recycling pick-ups continue without interruption as they are permitted by the State.

I also need to make an additional request on behalf of local grocery store employees, who have reached out with deep concern about patterns they are seeing -- consumers, often seniors, returning almost daily to make continued small purchases. Please refrain from doing this, as it puts these employees and other patrons at unnecessary risk. A stay at home order means making trips for essentials only as needed.

In closing, please know that I read all of your comments and messages about ways in which we can do better, along with the feedback forwarded to me by the Town Council members -- all of which are incorporated into my many daily discussions with our Town Administrator, Chief of Police, and Regional Health Officer.

While we will continue to re-assess and make any changes necessary to protect our community, I do know that many of you are, in fact, doing your part and taking this situation very seriously -- and, for that, I remain deeply grateful. The sooner we all comply and flatten the curve, the sooner our lives can return to normal.