

**COVID-19 Press Conference Transcript**  
**March 23, 2020**

**Jennifer Lyall – Public Information Officer for Cecil County Government:**

Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us today.

My name is Jennifer Lyall and I am the Public Information Officer for Cecil County Government.

County Executive Alan McCarthy requested this news conference today to provide open and transparent communication with the citizens of Cecil County to report on recent updates concerning COVID-19.

The county executive is joined today by:

1. Health Officer Ms. Lauren Levy
2. Director of Emergency Services, Chief Richard Brooks
3. Sheriff Scott Adams
4. Superintendent Dr. Jeffery Lawson
5. Director of Administration Mr. Al Wein
6. State’s Attorney James Dellmyer

In just a moment, County Executive McCarthy will provide a statement and then we will hear from the other members of our panel.

Questions from the media will be entertained at the conclusion of the press conference.

Any other questions may be directed to my email: [pio@ccgov.org](mailto:pio@ccgov.org).

Ladies and gentlemen, County Executive Dr. Alan McCarthy...

**Dr. Alan McCarthy – Cecil County Executive:**

Good afternoon.

This morning, Governor Hogan announced that additional non-essential business would be closed as of 5:00 p.m. today to support the importance of good social distancing.

In addition, law enforcement will be addressing violators participating in groups larger than 10, which the Governor reminded us, is against the law.

According to the latest statistics from the Maryland Department of Health we have 288 positive cases of coronavirus in Maryland.

As with many communities around the world, the impacts brought on by the Novel Coronavirus are being felt by the citizens of Cecil County.

Yesterday, Cecil County was notified of its first positive case of COVID-19.

The patient is a female in her 20s who lives in the Rising Sun area.

She has no history of recent foreign travel or known contact with anyone who traveled.

As of this morning, there are two more, for a total of three, laboratory confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Cecil County.

The second is a male in his 50s who lives in the Elkton area.

The third is a woman in her 40s, also in the Elkton area.

All three individuals are in stable condition and are self-isolating at home.

Both the Cecil County Health Department and the Maryland Department of Health are working collaboratively with the patients to conduct contact tracing.

This process will help to identify any people the individuals have been in close contact with recently.

Our prayers for a speedy recovery are extended to these individuals and their families.

Now, Health Officer Lauren Levy will provide additional information.

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

Thank you, County Executive McCarthy.

As Dr. McCarthy noted, there are now three confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Cecil County. I know that this news may make many people feel anxious, but we have been preparing for this eventuality and I want to encourage everyone to remain calm and stay informed about how they can help slow the spread of the virus.

In particular, we want to remind everyone of the importance of taking simple precautionary measures to reduce your risk of exposure and limit the spread of COVID-19.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover your mouth and nose while sneezing or coughing with a tissue or your elbow.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

- Sanitize frequently touched surfaces.
- Avoid contact with sick people.
- If you are sick, stay home and call your health care provider.
- Practice social distancing — keep 6 ft between yourself and others.

Now that we have documented community transmission in the county, these practices will be critical to slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. Even if you do not fall in one of the high-risk groups, it does not mean that you are not at risk for infection. Although your symptoms may be mild, you can still spread the virus. We must all act responsibly to protect community members who are most vulnerable to infection. The governor has issued closure orders and restrictions for a reason, it is important that we all follow these orders.

I know that there is great interest in getting tested for COVID-19. If you think that you might have COVID-19 and are experiencing respiratory symptoms such as fever, cough or shortness of breath, it is important that you stay home and self-isolate. If you have mild symptoms you should monitor your temperature and symptoms and check in with a health care provider if needed. You do not need to be tested. Older patients and individuals who have underlying medical conditions or are immunocompromised should contact their provider early in the course of even mild illness. Patients who have severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, should seek care immediately. I urge you to only seek care at the emergency department if you are experiencing a true medical emergency such as the inability to breathe.

When a case of COVID-19 is identified, Cecil County Health Department has an experienced team of communicable disease clinicians who investigate the case and any contacts the patient may have had. The Health Department will communicate individually with contacts determined to be at risk of infection. If it is determined that there is increased risk of exposure to the general public a statement will be issued.

The Health Department has established a dedicated phone line for individuals to call with COVID-19-related questions. Please call 410-996-1005 between 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday with any questions. Residents are also encouraged to visit [www.cecilcountyhealth.org](http://www.cecilcountyhealth.org) for current and accurate information.

Thank you.

**Dr. Jeffery Lawson - Superintendent for Cecil County Public Schools:**

Good afternoon. I'm Jeff Lawson, Superintendent of Cecil County Public School and before I start, I would like to thank Dr. McCarthy and County Government for providing this forum to further communicate with our families.

We are currently in week two of the state mandated school closure. We have been communicating regularly with families and our employees as often as we can, in order to provide important information and we will continue to do so. We have received many questions about further extension of this closure and how this will affect our proms, graduations, grades

and more. We are hopeful that the state will be providing more direction later this afternoon so that we can move forward with plans to address each of these questions.

In the meantime, our staff has been working throughout the closure to continue to plan and provide learning opportunities for students. In the event of an extended closure, we are actively developing a plan to transition from review-based work to delivery of new instructional material.

Our eight meal distribution sites have served well over 10,000 meals in our first six days of operation. I can't say enough about our food and nutrition staff and the amazing volunteer network that we've assembled. I've been with them throughout this closure and witnessed first-hand how hard they are working and the dedication that is so evident. Dr. McCarthy and I have had ongoing discussions as to how we can expand this to a fuller community-initiative involving other community partners.

In closing, I simply cannot thank enough our families and our community as well as the County Government. We are in this together and we will get through this together.

Thank you.

**Dr. Alan McCarthy – Cecil County Executive:**

Thank you very much, Superintendent Lawson and also our Health Secretary, Lauren Levy.

I have been advised by the Director of Emergency Management and the Health Officer that the COVID-19 virus poses a credible and significant risk to the residents of Cecil County. In order to further mobilize all available resources in response to this threat to public health, I have issued a declaration of emergency for Cecil County beginning today, the 23rd day of March 2020.

With this declaration, I am officially authorizing the deployment of requisite resources and requesting access to the Maryland Emergency Management Assistance Compact; and therefore, activating the Cecil County Emergency Operations Plan.

Obviously, the health and safety of our citizens is our number one priority. However, the wide diversity of businesses located in Cecil County to navigate the pandemic is also a priority as well. Our business owners are concerned, as are we. Employment for our citizens provides a sense of comfort as each deal with critical matters in the home. Our business leaders and owners are encouraged to follow continuous updates on the CCGOV website. In addition, click on Economic Development Department's link that provides information of specific interest to local businesses. This information is updated regularly.

As we continue to deal with this challenge, remember:

- Wash & sanitize your hands.
- If you do not feel well, stay home and self-isolate.
- Practice social distancing and avoid groups of 10 or larger.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.

Each and every one of us must practice these steps in order to make significant progress in eliminating exposure and help stop the spread of this virus. Each one of us has an obligation to our families, our friends, our entire County, to take this pandemic seriously.

Again, do not gather in large groups.

Stay home.

Sanitize and disinfect as much as possible.

We will update you as this crisis continues to affect Cecil County. Visit the County's website at [ccgov.org](http://ccgov.org) for the latest information.

Together we will be successful in eliminating this silent threat. God bless you and your families.

Thank you for your attendance.

**Jennifer Lyall – Public Information Officer for Cecil County Government:**

We will now take questions from the media.

*(Unintelligible chatter)*

Nancy Schwerzler, you can go ahead.

*(Chatter continues)*

**Jacqueline Covey – Cecil Whig:**

Okay, I'm Jacqueline Covey from the Cecil Whig. I just had a question about the two other confirmed positive cases. When did you find out that those cases were confirmed?

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

So, the question is when were the cases confirmed?

**Jacqueline Covey – Cecil Whig:**

Yes.

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

We received notification this morning.

**Jacqueline Covey – Cecil Whig:**

This morning?

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

Yes.

**Jacqueline Covey – Cecil Whig:**

I also just got a call, somebody was in, from one of these police or fire departments, somebody called me that there was a potential positive case in route to Union Hospital about an hour ago. Do you know anything about that case at all? Or is that one of the confirmed positive or negative cases?

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

I don't have any information about that case.

**Jacqueline Covey – Cecil Whig:**

That's all I have at this moment.

**Doug Donley – Cecil TV:**

It's Doug Donley from Cecil TV. I have two questions.

**Jennifer Lyall – Public Information Officer for Cecil County Government:**

Go Ahead.

**Doug Donley – Cecil TV:**

First question is regarding testing in Cecil County. Since the number of confirmed cases is a function of how many people are tested, do we know at this point how many tests have been administered here in Cecil?

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

Unfortunately, we do not. When the illness first started to spread, all testing was being done through state laboratories. For the past couple of weeks, it is being done through commercial laboratories as well and we do not receive information on pending tests. So, I don't have a number for you, unfortunately.

**Doug Donley – Cecil TV:**

Okay.

And my next question is, since Union Hospital is now operated by a Delaware institution, are we now part of the state of Delaware's considerations regarding the allotment of beds and resources, if there is a shortage? As is being predicted.

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

I think those conversations are happening at the state level between Delaware and Maryland. I am not personally involved in those conversations, but I know that mutual conversations are certainly happening.

**Doug Donley – Cecil TV:**

Thank you.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Nancy Schwerzler, Cecil Times.

**Jennifer Lyall – Public Information Officer for Cecil County Government:**

Go ahead.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Yes, a couple of questions. Let me start with Dr. Levy on the newest cases. These particular cases, do we know if they had any travel overseas or in other areas that might be heavily affected?

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

None of the...my apologies...none of the three confirmed cases are travel-related.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Okay. Also, Dr. Levy, let me ask you about testing. At this point, obviously with people being able to go to their own primary care physician and get a test at LabCorp, etc., we have less of a handle on it, but what is the capacity if someone is very seriously ill, what is the capacity for testing at Union Hospital?

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

So, Union Hospital beginning last week started drive-thru testing in Elkton. I think this week they are adding a Perryville site. Those opportunities for testing are by appointment-only and require a prescription from a provider. So, there is testing availability, but they are adhering to the CDC criteria which are rather restrictive, so it is only going to be limited to healthcare personnel, people who are at high risk who have severe symptoms.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Okay. Let me also follow up on Union Hospital and Doug's good question. I have been trying to get some answers out of Christiana for almost a week and have gotten no response, but I understand from other information that there are 8 intensive care unit beds at Union and perhaps up to 10 mechanical ventilators available. Is that supply adequate for the coronavirus situation we may be facing in Cecil County?

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

I think that's difficult to predict. I think if people engage in the social distancing practices and the good hygiene practices that are recommended, we are hopeful that we are not going to see the symptom surge that is expected if no intervention takes place. So, it's difficult to predict. But there are efforts to ensure that we have access to reserve supplies if needed and that is a conversation that is actively happening at the state level.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Among those reserve supplies would be ventilators that are in the national stockpile?

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

There are efforts to obtain additional ventilators from the stockpile and other sources, if that's my understanding.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Okay, but by the state order, do we have information that any of this might be allocated to Cecil County?

**Ms. Lauren Levy – Health Officer of the Cecil County Health Department:**

I think that will depend how cases unfold. I don't know that. And no firm decisions regarding those allocations have been made because we aren't really at that point yet.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Okay. Dr. McCarthy, can I ask you a follow-up question?

**Dr. Alan McCarthy – Cecil County Executive:**

Yes, ma'am.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Governor Cuomo of New York has been...obviously they are facing kind of the ground zero situation at the moment. He was very firm on national broadcast over the weekend that he is not waiting around for the federal government and he is going out on his own and reluctantly purchasing personal protective equipment, face masks etc. and trying to obtain ventilators even though he may be subject to price-gouging. Do you think Maryland should be doing more to obtain materials on its own rather than waiting for something to come through the federal stockpile? Should Maryland be taking stronger steps to get its own life-saving equipment?

**Dr. Alan McCarthy – Cecil County Executive:**

My opinion is that we should do anything that's necessary and practical to ensure the safety and health of the citizens of Cecil County. Chief Brooks has already made requests from the state's stockpiles and soon they are arriving, I think as we speak. Some of the items have already arrived. We will just have to monitor the availability and secure them as best as we can.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Follow-up with Chief Brooks. Mr. Brooks, what are the materials that you have asked for from the stockpile and are the items on the way or arriving?

**Chief Richard Brooks - Director of Emergency Services for Cecil County:**

Sure, thank you. The materials from the stockpile are just what you would expect at this point - masks, gowns or an outer cover garment, and those have been received. Actually, they were received Friday night. They were delivered to MIMS, the Maryland Institute of Emergency Medical Services. The Deputy Director here, John Donohue, went down to MIMS to receive that and those things have been distributed to our volunteer fire companies this morning. Which is what the intention was. So, those things have been requested. We know what the inventory is. We have not received a request, in numbers, from Union Hospital yet and as soon as we do, we will pursue those, but the stockpile has already been opened and Maryland had received it and Cecil County has received a component from there.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Do you have any numbers on how many masks, gowns, that kind of thing?

**Chief Richard Brooks - Director of Emergency Services for Cecil County:**

We will put that out in the briefing notes, sure.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Okay. Thank you.

If I could go back to Dr. McCarthy for a minute.

The Governor announced today a \$175 Million in small business loans and grants, through two new funds that they are creating and obviously that is a statewide agenda. Have you been receiving any estimates from your local business community? How bad the economic impact is going to be and how much assistance is our small business community is going to need?

**Dr. Alan McCarthy – Cecil County Executive:**

The direct answer to that is at this particular point in time we have not received any definitive information of what they might need. I think that the needs might grow as we move forward depending on how long it lasts, but I do not have those numbers right now.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

The Order that was put out today to close non-essential business, seems like just about everything has been closed anyway, but non-essential. The great question I'm hearing is does that mean liquor stores? Do we know?

**Dr. Alan McCarthy – Cecil County Executive:**

No, apparently liquor stores are quite essential.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Oh, okay, so they'll stay open?

**Dr. Alan McCarthy – Cecil County Executive:**

Yes, ma'am, they will stay open. The food distributors will stay open and things that are necessary to ensure public safety will be untouched.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Okay. Sheriff Adams, if I could ask you a quick question.

Obviously, the detention center is close quarters and every day is a challenge for your correctional officers. Are you issuing any special protective gear to your correctional officers? What are you doing at the correctional facility to try and cope with the potential contamination?

**Sheriff Scott Adams - Cecil County Sheriff's Office:**

Sure, good question. So, the correctional officers do have PPE available. So, masks, gloves and gown material. What we've done and we actually meant this morning in reference to if we would have some kind of infection happen in the detention center...we have a plan in place where we could move inmates from community correction side to the detention side, freeing up a 124 bed space area for an isolation/quarantine area, if need be. Of course, we hope it doesn't come to that, but yes, we have plans in place.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Obviously, you know, you have a contracted service that provides medical care there. Has there been any changes in the way medical care is delivered or are there any, perhaps, emergency plans for delivery of medical care if you had to activate such an emergency plan?

**Sheriff Scott Adams - Cecil County Sheriff's Office:**

Yes. Primecare is our medical provider in the detention center and we have multiple updates daily from Primecare and their leaders there that are continuing to follow this both...they have facilities in both Maryland and Pennsylvania. So, we are constantly in contact and staying up to date with the changes there.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

How are you enforcing the social distancing?

**Sheriff Scott Adams - Cecil County Sheriff's Office:**

So right now...

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

Talking about the inmates.

**Sheriff Scott Adams - Cecil County Sheriff's Office:**

Well inmates are...so we have the whole outside no entry into the facility outside of essential food or medical staff that would come in. So, inside we are just, we have social distancing occurring just about every day. We don't have open rec space where we have more people and again, we are trying to limit movement throughout the facility to not cross-contaminate if we did have any kind of infection.

**Nancy Schwerzler – Cecil Times:**

I see. And if I understand correctly, you have already cancelled outside people coming in for religious or educational programs?

**Sheriff Scott Adams - Cecil County Sheriff's Office:**

Correct. There is all outside visitation is currently suspended.

**Jennifer Lyall – Public Information Officer for Cecil County Government:**

We'll take one more question if there is anyone else.

Carl?

**Carl Hamilton – Cecil Whig:**

Howdy. Sheriff.

**Sheriff Scott Adams - Cecil County Sheriff's Office:**

Yes, sir?

**Carl Hamilton – Cecil Whig:**

Is the gathering of no more than 10 people, is that an initiative or is that just something that if that's reported, you react to it and is there any kind of definition of what a gathering is?

**Sheriff Scott Adams - Cecil County Sheriff's Office:**

So, 10 or more people is what that definition is.

**Carl Hamilton – Cecil Whig:**

With a common cause to meet or is it.... I mean, the stores have more than 10 people and that's not a gathering, per-say, but how do you...?

**Sheriff Scott Adams - Cecil County Sheriff's Office:**

Right. So, it would be an organized gathering and so how we are dealing with that...so that's a good question. As you heard the Governor's Order that again came out with a little more force, I would say, at his meeting at 11:00 a.m., we are going to respond to calls, if we get a call for a gathering of 10 or more people. We have some protocol and I have spoken with the State's Attorney, James Dellmyer, and we have some plans in place for that as well. So, we will first respond, to see if there is an actual violation. If there is an actual violation after we've

responded, we are going to ask for voluntary compliance and that is what we hope to have occur in this situation. And we've seen, for the most part, people are being responsive and responsible as far as that is concerned. And if it would go beyond voluntary compliance, then we would identify a leader or organizer of the group and they may be cited. If it got beyond that, which we would hope as we've given several levels of that not occurring, then we could come to an arrest situation and those situations we are going to work dynamically with the State's Attorney and come to the best possible outcome.

**Carl Hamilton – Cecil Whig:**

Okay. And the citing would be like a criminal citation?

**Sheriff Scott Adams - Cecil County Sheriff's Office:**

A criminal citation, correct.

**Carl Hamilton – Cecil Whig:**

And then from there, if you don't have compliance, it will move onto an arrest situation.

**Sheriff Scott Adams - Cecil County Sheriff's Office:**

Last case scenario.

**Carl Hamilton – Cecil Whig:**

Have you had anything like that so far?

**Sheriff Scott Adams - Cecil County Sheriff's Office:**

Have not.

**Carl Hamilton – Cecil Whig:**

Okay.

**Jennifer Lyall – Public Information Officer for Cecil County Government:**

This concludes our press conference. Again, if you have any follow-up questions you can send them to my e-mail which is [pio@ccgov.org](mailto:pio@ccgov.org). I want to thank our interrupter, Miss Paula Honda, for being here with us today and we'll talk to you soon.

Thanks.

*(End of press conference)*

Transcribed: March 23, 2020  
By: Rebekah Corle