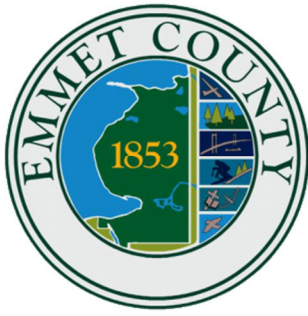




Emmet County News Release

For immediate release – April 5, 2020

Penalties May Be Imposed for Violations of State's Orders to Prevent Spread of COVID-19 Virus

With more than 10,000 cases of coronavirus disease recorded throughout Michigan as of April 2, state officials have taken new, more punitive steps to enforce the governor's recent executive orders.

Robert Gordon, Director of Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), issued an emergency order on Thursday, April 2, declaring the state has reached epidemic status and authorizing local health departments, law enforcement, and prosecutors to carry out and enforce Governor Gretchen Whitmer's executive orders put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and keep everyone safe.

The MDHHS emergency order on April 2 establishes a civil penalty of up to \$1,000 and provides a process for law enforcement and prosecutors in handling violations by people or businesses of the following recent executive orders from Governor Whitmer:

- Executive Order 2020-11 which temporarily prohibits large assemblages and events and temporarily closes schools
- Executive Order 2020-20 which places temporary restrictions on the use of places of public accommodation
- Executive Order 2020-21 which temporarily restricts gatherings and travel and prohibits in-person work that is not necessary to sustain or protect life

Emmet County Sheriff Pete Wallin said that prior to this order from MDHHS, violations were treated as misdemeanors punishable by jail time and a \$500 fine. Prosecutors will still be able enforce those misdemeanor violations, Sheriff Wallin reported.

The order allows local law enforcement and prosecutors the option to refer persons or businesses to licensing agencies, if applicable. Criminal penalties will also still be an option for prosecutors to pursue.

"A person can have coronavirus without knowing it," Gordon said in the press release from his department on April 2. "They can spread the disease to others who can spread it to others. The only way to stop the spread is social distancing. A civil penalty and potential licensing actions send a strong message to Michiganders that social distancing is essential to saving lives."

Though licensed entities violating the new emergency orders can be referred to relevant licensing agencies, places of religious worship are exempt from the MDHHS emergency order, as long as they are being used for religious worship.

Sheriff Wallin said his office will continue to investigate violations of the executive orders and will forward violations to the Emmet County Prosecutor's Office for review. He reported that his office and other county departments are receiving many calls regarding non-essential businesses operating in violation of the governor's executive orders.

"Citizens should use caution when interpreting if work is essential," Sheriff Wallin said. "People and businesses need to adhere to the governor's order to 'Stay Home, Stay Safe' and do the right thing to stop the spread of COVID-19."

Please refer to the county's COVID-19 webpage at www.emmetcounty.org/covid19 for more information, including links to state and federal guidance on what is considered part of the critical, essential infrastructure as well as to the governor's executive orders listed above.

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For questions about this news release, please contact Michael Reaves, County Administrator, (231) 348-1701 or email mreaves@emmetcounty.org. Law enforcement questions should be directed to the Sheriff's Office at (231) 347-2036 or to the Prosecuting Attorney's Office at (231) 348-0686 or email PA@emmetcounty.org.