



Citizens of Bristol, Johnson City, Kingsport and all of Sullivan and Washington counties:

Our communities are facing unprecedented challenges in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As of today, there is only one case in our region and no evidence of community transmission—but it is crucial that our region takes definitive steps to prepare for the coming weeks.

Our highest priorities are the health and safety of our citizens as well as continuity of government and service delivery. This includes emergency services, water and utilities, and waste collection. We confer with Health Department officials, meet with our key personnel, and talk with each other on a daily basis to ensure our response is appropriate, adequate and aligned.

Mitigation of the spread of COVID-19 is critical and that is why, per the recommendation of our health departments and Centers for Disease Control (CDC), we are suspending events and programs in our cities as well as closing recreation centers and other facilities that draw crowds. Other services, such as public transit, will operate as regularly as possible based upon the guidance from our public health officials.

We do not take the decision to cancel programs or close facilities lightly. Our hope is that these proactive steps will slow the spread of the virus, particularly among our most vulnerable neighbors and loved ones. Taking action now will help limit the duration of these interruptions so we can return to normal operations as soon as possible.

Our cities and counties are dedicated to maintaining healthy and safe work environments for our personnel. It is in everyone's best interest for our employees to remain healthy and able to provide essential services. Sanitation efforts have increased significantly. First responders are taking extra precautions, and 911 dispatchers are collecting additional information to further assess the needs of callers and first responders. Should we need to deploy them, we have internal plans that will allow for modified schedules and remote work options. We have canceled all non-essential meetings and are limiting face-to-face contact. With that in mind, we strongly encourage citizens to conduct business with us online or via phone. Limiting walk-in traffic will go a long way in keeping our facilities open and safe.

We are often asked for guidance on what our communities could or should do. While we defer to health officials for much of that information, we can offer the following:

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often. Wash for at least 20 seconds and with soap and water. Use hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
- Practice social distancing. Maintain 6-8 feet between yourself and others. Avoid large groups or crowds.

- Use curbside pickup and delivery options! Local businesses are modifying operations during this time. We urge everyone to “Distance Socially, Support Locally.” Visit these Facebook pages: @believeinbristol, @BristolChamber, @JCGoAllLocal, and @KPTSTRONG for information on changes to local businesses and how you can still support them.
- Utilize online services as much as possible. Check city websites for online payment and autodraft options, permit applications, etc.
- Stay home if you feel ill or if you are considered high risk. The CDC defines “high risk” as older adults and people with chronic medical conditions. These individuals should consider avoiding large gatherings like church services, birthday parties, or funerals.
- Check on neighbors who are considered high risk. Pick up necessities like groceries and medications for them so they don’t have to go into public places.
- Spend time outdoors! Enjoy city parks. Unplug. Breathe in fresh air.
- Business owners and employees should know that we are working closely with state officials on timely assistance and relief options. We are evaluating all the ways in which we may offer support during this challenging time. Please sign up at www.RegionAhead.com to be included in a business directory that will be a great resource moving forward.

Each City is maintaining a webpage with up-to-date schedule changes and information. Please check them often:

<https://www.bristoltn.org/covid19>

<https://www.johnsoncitytn.org/covid-19>

<https://www.kingsporttn.gov/covid-19-response>

We are a resourceful, resilient region of citizens who care deeply about their neighbors. We will get through this challenging period together. Thank you for doing your part to keep the Tri-Cities safe.

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