



**Borough of  
New Bethlehem**  
Incorporated February 12, 1853

**OFFICE OF THE MAYOR**

210 Lafayette St. New Bethlehem PA 16242

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PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Publication:

UPDATED: March 22, 2020

**NEW BETHLEHEM MAYOR & COUNCIL ADDRESS CORONAVIRUS**

To the people of the New Bethlehem area and Redbank Valley community:

I want to speak with you about our community's unprecedented response to the coronavirus outbreak that started in China and is now spreading through the world. The health, safety, and wellness of our residents within the community is our highest priority.

Over the past several weeks;

- The World Health Organization officially announced the Coronavirus is a global pandemic
- President Trump restricted all travel from Europe to the United States
- Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf encouraged the suspension of large gatherings, events and conferences of 250 or more people
- Clarion University, among other schools have temporarily moved to online classes
- Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf temporary closed public schools for 10 business days
- President Trump has declared a national emergency
- Governor Tom Wolf 'strongly urged' the closing of non-essential businesses, *"but if you, or a business owner you know wishes to remain in business, it is their right to do so"*
- President Trump advised national limit of no more than 10 people gatherings as part of social distancing measures aimed at slowing the spread of the virus.
- Clarion County signed a declaration of emergency and advised other communities to follow suit
- New Bethlehem Borough signed a declaration of emergency which allows the borough to receive financial aid, special assistance and expedite hiring and contracting processes to support the borough's operations related to Federal, State and County emergency procedures.
- Governor Tom Wolf ordered all non-life-sustaining businesses in Pennsylvania to close their physical locations as of 8 p.m. March 19, to slow the spread of COVID-19. Enforcement actions against businesses that do not close physical locations will begin Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>.

As part of Governor Wolf's statewide social-distancing plan, officials are discouraging residents from participating in smaller-scale recreational activities, such as going to movie theaters, gyms, and encouraging local churches to exercise discretion to limit the spread.

Many activities, conferences and other events are being postponed and canceled across the Commonwealth. Locally, the Redbank Valley School District, Redbank Valley Chamber of Commerce, and the Redbank Valley Community Center, among many other groups and organizations, are postponing or cancelling various community events and activities.

*New Bethlehem Borough fosters business, community, and personal growth within the borough while maintaining the small town appeal and family friendly environment that makes New Bethlehem a great place to work, live and raise a family.*



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Some local businesses are taking precautions such as temporarily closing or allowing employees to work from home per Governor Wolf's Mitigation Guide for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and specifically for Montgomery County. *"Supermarkets, pharmacies, and gas stations will remain open. The Governor and the Commonwealth recommends that non-essential retail facilities close."*

Please do not misunderstand these temporary closings and cancellations as mass hysteria or overreaction, but these recommendations are a public health strategy known as 'flattening the bell curve' by the CDC, because we only have so much capacity to deal with a lot of very sick people. If we can delay the spread by keeping people away from each other, we have a chance to help more people effectively and not overwhelm hospitals and infrastructure. There are only so many nurses, doctors, hospital beds and pieces of equipment to help people that may eventually get virus related pneumonia.

I recognize the fact that some people view these precautions as unnecessary and exaggerated. However, public officials take these actions out of an abundance of caution and to mitigate unnecessary risks. Social distancing and appropriate preventative measures as outlined by the CDC are critically necessary to significantly reduce the transmission of the virus.

Dr. Abdu Sharkawy (Ab-du Shaw-cow), an infectious disease specialist warned about the loss of reason in the face of panic over the coronavirus; *"I encourage all of you to temper fear with reason, panic with patience, and uncertainty with education. We have an opportunity to learn a great deal about health hygiene and limiting the spread of innumerable transmissible diseases in our society. Let's meet this challenge together in the best spirit of compassion for others, patience, and above all, an unflinching effort to seek truth, facts and knowledge as opposed to conjecture, speculation and catastrophizing."*

The same preventative measures used for the normal cold and flu should be applied, including:

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Wash hands regularly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
- Cover coughs and sneezes with elbow, and wash hands afterwards
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using cleaning spray or wipes
- Stay home if sick to avoid spreading it at work or school

New Bethlehem Borough Council and the Office of the Mayor will continue to monitor this evolving situation in collaboration with the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, and other health-related agencies. Furthermore, we will work alongside the Redbank Valley School District, Chamber of Commerce, Community Center and local businesses to keep the public educated, informed, safe and secure. Pray for all our first-responders and medical professionals, including Police, Fire, EMS as well as our local doctors, nurses and hospital staff.

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Please stay connected to our community's websites and social media for public service announcements, the latest news and other helpful resources. See links below for more info.

We are all in this together. We must put politics aside, and unify together as one community and one family. As history has proven time and time again, our community always rises to the challenge to overcome adversity. The state of our community and our future remains brighter than anyone can imagine. Acting with compassion and love, we will heal the sick, care for those in need, help our fellow citizens, and emerge from this challenge stronger and more unified than ever before.

May God bless the New Bethlehem area and the Redbank Valley community. Thank you.

Gordon V. Barrows, Mayor  
Mayor of New Bethlehem Pennsylvania

Lisa D. Kerle, President  
Sandra C. Mateer, Vice President  
Bryan Ruth, President pro-tempore  
Richard McGarrity, Executive Secretary  
Stewart Bain, Council Member  
Don Heeter, Council Member  
Brian Fox, Council Member  
Scott Barrett, Council Member

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**HELPFUL RESOURCES:**

New Bethlehem Borough:

[NewBethlehemBoro.com/coronavirus](http://NewBethlehemBoro.com/coronavirus)

Redbank Valley Area

[RedbankValley.org/coronavirus](http://RedbankValley.org/coronavirus)

Redbank Valley School District

<http://www.redbankvalley.net/index.php/district/district-news.html>

List of life-sustaining businesses

<https://www.governor.pa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/20200319-Life-Sustaining-Business.pdf>

Clarion University:

[www.clarion.edu/coronavirus](http://www.clarion.edu/coronavirus)

Unemployment Frequently Asked Questions:

<https://www.corporatecostcontrol.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID20203-2.pdf>

Resources for Local Government Officials:

<https://boroughs.org/fullnews.php?id=49>

PA Department of Health

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

**[Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#)**

- [How COVID-19 Spreads](#)
- [COVID-19 Symptoms](#)
- [What To Do If You Are Sick](#)
- [Information for Household Members and Caregivers of someone who is Sick](#)
- [People at Risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19](#)

If you have any questions about the Coronavirus, contact the PA Department of Health at 877-PA-HEALTH or your local county emergency management coordinator. <https://www.pema.pa.gov/County-EMC/Pages/default.aspx>