

How Governments Could Affect Your Business During Coronavirus Outbreak

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Now that coronavirus [has officially made its appearance in Pennsylvania](#), the potential that the government may mandate closures of schools and businesses and impose quarantines looms large.

Businesses and other non-governmental entities can always decide voluntarily to close temporarily or otherwise curtail operations to protect their employees and customers. Nonetheless, governmental bodies, especially at the state and local levels, have broad powers to impose closures or restrict movement to combat epidemics. This authority is commonly referred to as "police powers."

Under Pennsylvania law, the governor can declare a disaster emergency through executive order or proclamation upon finding that a disaster has either occurred or the threat of such is imminent. The governor has the ability to:

- Direct and compel evacuation
- Suspend or limit the sale, dispensing or transportation of alcoholic beverages, firearms, explosives and combustibles
- Regulate movement inside the affected area

Although we have typically seen these powers exerted in regard to natural disasters - such as the common restriction of travel on major highways during a major snow event - epidemics also fall within the emergency provisions.

Last week [Gov. Tom Wolf enacted the Emergency Disaster Declaration](#), which provided increased support to state agencies involved in the response to the virus. This declaration authorized the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency Director to assume command and control of all statewide emergency operations and authorize and direct that all commonwealth departments and agencies use all available resources and personnel necessary to cope with the emergency situation. With an emergency declared, it will likely fall to local officials to determine what local schools and businesses should be doing in response. The federal government generally relies on state and local governments to implement quarantines and other restrictions.

Employers should stay informed, and follow the advice of federal, state and local health officials. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [maintains an updated web page on the coronavirus](#), with helpful guidance and resources for employers. Employers should be planning now how to weather either voluntary closures or closures and quarantines that may be mandated by the government. Attorneys across Barley Snyder's various practice groups are well-positioned and prepared to assist clients in crafting strategies to prepare for the coronavirus.

If you have any questions on how your business should prepare for government-ordered shutdowns, please contact [Martin Siegel](#).

More on the legalities of Coronavirus:

EMPLOYMENT: [Coronavirus and Workplace Preparedness](#)

BUSINESS: [Is COVID-19 a "Force Majeure" Event?](#)

SENIOR LIVING: [Coronavirus and Senior Living Facilities](#)

EDUCATION: [Schools Already Planning for Coronavirus](#)

BUSINESS: [Planning for Coronavirus: A Necessary Business Exercise](#)

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