During a novel coronavirus briefing, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced that New York State will contract with 28 private labs to increase testing capacity for the novel coronavirus. Following a call with the 28 labs, the Governor announced that he has instructed the labs to begin testing immediately as soon as they are ready. The 28 labs are specialized in virology and are routine partners with the New York State Department of Health.

The Governor also announced the State University of New York and the City University of New York will implement plans to maximize distance learning and reduce in-person classes, beginning March 19th, for the remainder of the Spring semester in light of the evolving novel coronavirus situation in New York. All campuses will develop plans catered to the campus and curriculum-specific needs while reducing density in the campus environment to help slow possibility for exposures to novel coronavirus. Distance learning and other options will be developed by campuses.
Governor Cuomo announced the state will guarantee two full weeks of paid leave for all state workers who are subject to a mandatory or precautionary order of quarantine as a result of the novel coronavirus. Employees will not have to charge accruals during the time taken off work for quarantine. This will apply to all state employees, regardless of civil service classification, bargaining unit, and regardless of part time or accrual status.

Finally, the Governor also confirmed 43 additional cases of novel coronavirus, bringing the statewide total to 216 confirmed cases in New York State. Of the 216 total individuals who tested positive for the virus, the geographic breakdown is as follows:

Westchester: 121 (13 new)
New York City: 52 (16 new)
Nassau: 28 (9 new)
Suffolk: 6 (5 new)
Rockland: 6
Saratoga: 2
Ulster: 1

"While the risk to New Yorkers remains low, we are taking a number of steps out of an abundance of caution to protect public health including asking SUNY and CUNY to implement strategies to reduce density on campuses for the remainder of the semester," Governor Cuomo said. "At the same time, we're continuing to prioritize ramping up testing capacity because the more people you identify as having the virus, the better you can contain it. We're also leading by example and providing paid leave to all state workers who are quarantined as a result of the virus - and we encourage businesses to voluntarily do telecommuting to the extent possible. Again I want to remind people to keep this in perspective: the facts do not justify the fear in this situation and the facts here should actually reduce anxiety."

After speaking with business leaders today, Governor Cuomo also announced a new cooperative effort with New York business leaders to voluntarily implement different work shifts and telecommuting in an effort to reduce density.

Additionally, the Governor announced that the New York State Department of Health will grant $200,000 to a local food bank in New Rochelle to help the community as it faces a cluster of positive cases of the novel coronavirus. Nine schools in New Rochelle are currently closed as a result of the containment zone set yesterday, and this funding will help ensure any student or family who relies on free school lunches can continue to access it during this containment effort.

SUNY Chancellor Kristina M. Johnson said, "We have been working closely with the Governor and the Department of Health to allow SUNY students to continue their education online or remotely, thus limiting their exposure to the COVID-19 while ensuring academic continuity. SUNY Online is a major initiative for our System, and we have been preparing to migrate many of our academic programs to this new distance-
learning platform. With more than 100,000 SUNY students currently taking one or more of their courses online with us, we believe we are prepared and well-positioned to take advantage of remote instruction to further our student's education during this crisis."

CUNY Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez said: "The transition to distance learning protects our students and all of our campus communities, while enabling the University to ensure academic continuity, safeguarding students' ability to finish the semester and protecting their financial aid. Our 25 campuses, including dorms, libraries, and research facilities, will remain open. The health and safety of the University community remains our top priority and I am glad that this measure allows CUNY to continue serving its students while alleviating pressure on our area during this public health threat."

Yesterday, Governor Cuomo accepted the recommendation of State Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker for new emergency measures to contain the novel coronavirus cluster in New Rochelle. The area currently has 108 confirmed cases and is considered a "cluster." The protocols include closing schools, houses of worship and other large gathering facilities within a one-mile radius in New Rochelle for a two-week period, from Thursday, March 12th to Wednesday, March 25th.

The Governor deployed National Guard troops to a Health Department command post in New Rochelle to assist with the outbreak. The troops are mobilizing to deliver food to homes and help with cleaning public spaces in the containment area.

The Governor also announced the State will partner with Northwell Health to set up a satellite testing facility in New Rochelle. Visits would operate by appointment only. More information will be posted soon on the State Department of Health website.

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