

# **Governor Cooper Signs Order to Tighten Social Distancing Measures, Strengthen Long-Term Care Rules and Streamline Unemployment Benefits Process: *Executive Order No. 131 Sets Policies for Retail Stores, Enforces Mandatory Rules at Nursing Homes and Expedites Issuing Unemployment Benefits***

Raleigh  
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Governor Roy Cooper took action to address the spread of COVID-19 by issuing stronger social distancing requirements and speeding up the process to get benefits to people out of work through Executive Order No. 131.

Three key areas are addressed in Executive Order 131. The first requires retail stores that are still operating to implement new social distancing policies to make shopping safer for customers and employees. The second makes earlier COVID-19 guidelines mandatory for nursing facilities, and recommends other long-term care facilities to do the same. The third area is unemployment benefits, issuing changes that will speed up certain benefit payments to those who are out of work.

“North Carolina continues to take strong action to slow the spread of COVID-19, and today’s Order will help make stores safer, protect those living and working in nursing homes, and get more unemployment benefits out quicker. Our state is resilient, and we will get through this crisis together if we all do our part,” said Governor Cooper.

## **POLICIES FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING IN RETAIL STORES**

This Order offers clear requirements that essential businesses must implement in order to safeguard the health of customers and employees. Some of the directives include:

- Setting limits of how many people can be in a store at one time, 5 people per 1,000 square feet of retail space or 20% of fire marshal posted occupancy limits
- Marking 6 feet of distance for areas where people gather like checkout lines
- Requiring specific cleaning measures for retail stores

The Order encourages:

- Implementing hygiene recommendations for employees and customers, like hand sanitizer at the doors and face coverings for workers
- Establishing designated shopping times designated for high-risk groups
- Creating barriers between customers and employees at checkout to lower the risk of required interactions

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The Order states these requirements will last for thirty days unless extended by further executive action.

## **LOWERING RISK IN LONG TERM CARE FACILITIES**

The Order sets public health and safety requirements for nursing homes during the public health emergency. The Order encourages other long-term care facilities to follow the same guidance. Some of the directives include:

- Canceling communal activities, including group meals
- Taking the temperature of employees and essential personnel when they enter the facility
- Requiring specific personal protective equipment in the facility
- Requiring close monitoring of residents for COVID-19 health indicators like body temperature

The Order states these requirements will last until this order is repealed.

## **STREAMLINING UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE CLAIMS**

The Order makes it easier for employers to file a batch of claims, called an attached claim, on behalf of their employees. By temporarily eliminating some of the hurdles for employers, benefits can get in the hands of those who need them faster.

The Order will extend 60 days beyond the date the state of emergency is lifted to allow employers to get back on their feet.

Additionally, the Division of Employment Services issued [information](#) on timing of federal benefits reaching North Carolinians today.

Read the full [Order](#).

Read [questions and answers](#) about specific items in the order.

Make sure the information you are getting about COVID-19 is coming directly from reliable sources like the CDC and NCDHHS. For more information, please visit the CDC's website at [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) and NCDHHS' website at [www.ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus), which includes daily updates on positive COVID-19 test results in North Carolina.

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