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In search of masks and some changes, businesses adapt to new state order



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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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affected.

A day after Pennsylvania's top health official signed an order with new requirements on wearing masks at businesses that are still open, companies were scrambling to change their habits before enforcement starts Sunday.

There are no plans to give leniency or extend the deadline, according to Nate Wardle, press secretary for the state Department of Health.

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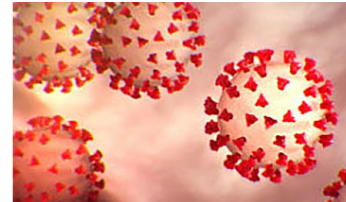
On Thursday, the state said the order applied to businesses where employees are interacting with the public. Mr. Wardle updated that guidance Friday to include all life-sustaining businesses that



All life-sustaining businesses must follow new state order requiring masks for employees

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That leaves masses of grocery stores, pharmacies and other operations with just a few days to implement a raft of new rules for maintaining social distancing, cleaning and mitigation protocols — and acquiring enough masks for all their employees.

For some, that's already proven tricky.

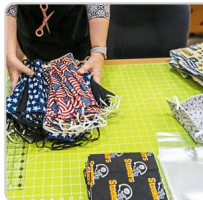
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come by ... We're doing whatever we can to get them.”

After weeks of working with suppliers, online vendors and even some people who offered to make masks for the grocer, Mr. Englert said his company is relying on its warehouse to provide about 150 masks for each of the three Community Supermarkets. The masks should come within the next few days, and hopefully beat the Sunday deadline.

Like many businesses, Mr. Englert said Community Supermarket had already been offering masks to employees who wanted to wear them. Most did, he said.

As the novel coronavirus pandemic has spread, a growing number of businesses had begun offering protective equipment to employees. Walmart made masks available starting March 31. Walgreens began providing them April 3. Whole Foods started requiring employees to wear masks while at work on Monday. Target announced Thursday a plan to distribute face masks and gloves when they arrive in one to two weeks.



Alexis Johnson

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Because of the challenges presented by significant shortages in

providing and replenishing hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes and personal protective equipment, she said.

The U.S. Postal Service, which is providing masks and face coverings for all employees, said it could not share where it sourced the materials, how many were needed and how many employees chose to wear a mask. The postal service said that was “proprietary information.”

Tom Charley, co-owner of three Shop 'n Save stores in Greensburg and Murrysville, started taking measures to protect workers in mid-March. Because he stays connected with other store owners around the country, he said he got tips on best practices before any requirements had been put in place in Pennsylvania.

In addition to providing masks, his store already had barriers up for cashiers, took employees' temperatures before starting their shift and started to sanitize the store continuously for 12 hours of the day.

But Mr. Charley doesn't agree with all of the new requirements and is working with the Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association to convince the state to make changes. The association said it would like to work with Gov. Tom Wolf's administration to adjust some of the operational guidelines before they are enforced on Sunday.

In particular, Mr. Charley is concerned with the guidelines that require stores to use only use every other register. That makes sense when the store isn't busy, he said, but will push people in to the aisles when it is, making social distancing even more difficult.

"It sounds like a good idea in theory but in practice it's not exactly where you want to be on it, it doesn't achieve the goal you want to achieve," he said. "We see it every day on the front lines."

He's not opposed to all of the requirements. "Obviously it's a challenge for us to do some of this stuff," Mr. Charley said. "But we're going to work our butts off to make our stores the safest place we possibly can."

Wendell Young, president of Local 1776 chapter of the United Food and Commercial Workers, said he would challenge employers to go even further than the requirements laid out by the state.

"Most of our employers really did the right thing and did not fight us and worked with us to implement things. But it wasn't perfect," Mr. Young said. "As we look at it from the lens of what we know now, more could have been done."

Businesses that don't follow the new order should be held accountable, he said, the same way a drunk driver is held accountable for endangering the lives of others.

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