



OHIO TOWNSHIP ASSOCIATION

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COVID-19, Ohio's Townships & the Ohio Township Association

The OTA's Recommendations, Resources and Reminders

Blacklick, Ohio - The Ohio Township Association (OTA) has monitored the spread of COVID-19 (also referred to as coronavirus) throughout the United States and will continue to do so with the confirmation of Ohio's first cases. The purpose of this release is to provide the OTA's official recommendations for township protection, resources, and reminders for officials, staff, and OTA stakeholders in the face of this virus. As Ohio's primary election day draws near - which will bring hundreds of Ohioans together in township halls that double as polling places - efforts to slow the spread of this virus must be vigilant.

According to the CDC, "For the general American public, such as workers in non-healthcare settings and where it is unlikely that work tasks create an increased risk of exposures to COVID-19, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low." With a focus on prevention, township officials and staff may yet be able to protect their communities.

On Thursday, March 12, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine officially banned mass gatherings of 100 or more people. With this in mind, alongside the OTA's belief that townships' preventative efforts are of the utmost importance, **the OTA recommends that all County Township Association (CTA) meetings be postponed until the Governor lifts the ban on mass gatherings.**

The OTA recently represented Ohio's townships at meetings in Washington, D.C.; shortly afterward, cases of COVID-19 were reported in that area. In order to take the highest precaution and to minimize any possible exposure to township officials, staff, and residents across the state, **no OTA staff member will attend CTA meetings scheduled over the next three weeks.**

"Our goal has and will be to continue operations at the OTA office seamlessly, despite this unprecedented situation," said OTA Executive Director Heidi Fought.

OTA staff will continue to offer support and resources, and the Association will strive to provide information and updates as the situation develops. The **April OTA Board meeting and the upcoming CLOUT meeting have been canceled**, and the **April 24 Zoning Inspectors Group meeting has been postponed until July 17** out of an abundance of caution. The *Grassroots Clippings* newsletter and the upcoming County Memo will both provide updates to OTA members, as available, in the coming months.



WHAT ARE THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT RESPONSIBILITIES OF OHIO TOWNSHIPS UNDER A DECLARED STATE OF EMERGENCY?

On Thursday, March 12, Ohio Attorney General Yost referred to the Ohio Revised Code with regard to Ohio's Open Meetings Law under the state of emergency declared by Governor DeWine. AG Yost stated that **while the requirement for public officials to meet in-person still stands, under the Governor's official state of emergency, it is no longer required for the public to be allowed attendance in-person.** His office later issued [this letter of clarification](#), and also advised townships to consult their prosecutors for advice.

The OTA would like to emphasize that township officials **should not** conduct remote meetings, meetings via social media, or other types of meetings **in which the officials would not be present together** in-person. However, this still means that townships can utilize an app or website, such as Facebook Live, to provide for public participation in their meetings.

AG Yost's office released the 2020 Sunshine Laws Manual this week - earlier than usual - in an effort to offer resources to government officials in the face of COVID-19. [View it online here.](#)

IMPACT ON OHIO'S PRIMARY ELECTION & TOWNSHIP POLLING PLACES

The primary election is quickly approaching in Ohio (Tuesday, March 17). Many township halls across the state are utilized as polling places for such elections. **It is imperative** that township officials and staff take precautions and focus on protecting their townships. Practical ways to do this include:

- Providing alcohol-based hand sanitizer outside polling booths and near other voting-related equipment (hand sanitizer should be available both before and after use of voting equipment).
- Disinfecting and regularly cleaning frequently touched surfaces within the township hall and associated facilities.
- Posting signs and posters that give reminders of basic health habits, such as covering coughs and sneezes and refraining from touching one's eyes, mouth and nose.

RESOURCES FOR:

- Township facilities that double as polling places:
 - [Ohio Department of Health \(ODH\) resources](#)
- EMS and law enforcement personnel, all of whom who may come into contact with residents who have COVID-19:
 - [CDC information for such personnel](#)
- Township officials to distribute in their communities:
 - [ODH has prepared "checklists," or PDFs of information for specific audiences, that township officials may want to distribute in their communities](#)

Please also see the following:

- [Department of Labor guidance on unemployment insurance flexibilities, such as an individual receiving paid sick or family leave](#)
- [The CDC's Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)
- [Governor Mike DeWine's recommendations as of March 10, 2020](#)



The OTA encourages township officials and staff to focus on good health habits, such as:

- Avoid shaking hands and other personal contact.
- Wash hands frequently and well; provide hand sanitizer in township facilities.
- Throughout the day, disinfect cell phone cases, doorknobs, desks, computer keyboards, phones, light switches, and handrails.
- Remove office snacks or candy dishes and disinfect shared office supplies, such as pens and staplers.

At the time of this release, just 13 Ohioans have been confirmed positive for COVID-19. The OTA believes that with vigilance and wise precautions, townships can play a part in minimizing COVID-19's impact in Ohio.

Township officials and staff should contact the OTA office with any questions or concerns at 614-863-0045 or communications@ohiotownships.org, or their county prosecutor.

NOTE FROM THE OTA: Please share this information with your fellow township officials. Thank you!

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The Ohio Township Association is a statewide organization dedicated to the promotion and preservation of township government in Ohio. The OTA was founded on June 28, 1928, and is organized in 87 Ohio counties. OTA has more than 5,200 active members, made up of trustees and fiscal officers from Ohio's 1,308 townships, and more than 4,000 associate members.