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# WA Dept. of Health asking lawmakers for \$100M for coronavirus response

By [AUSTIN JENKINS \(/PEOPLE/AUSTIN-JENKINS\)](#) • MAR 2, 2020

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*Washington Sec. of Health John Wiesman testifies before the Senate Ways and Means Committee about the coronavirus outbreak and associated costs.*

AUSTIN JENKINS / NORTHWEST NEWS NETWORK

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As the death toll rises, Washington's Secretary of Health is asking state lawmakers for \$100 million in emergency funds (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/committeeschedules/Home/Documents/26800#>) to respond to the coronavirus outbreak. That's a 10-fold increase over what the Washington Senate approved just last week.

"We know we've got the coronavirus in our community, we know that we're having some community spread, we know that the risk is increasing," Sec. of Health John Wiesman (<https://www.doh.wa.gov/AboutUs/Leadership/SecretaryofHealth>) told the Senate Ways and Means Committee Monday morning.

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Wiesman's request for a dramatic increase in public health spending during the current two-year budget cycle comes as Washington becomes the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States. As of Monday afternoon (<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>), six people in the state had died and there were 18 confirmed cases of the disease with more expected in the coming days.

"We want to mount a response that is the right response for Washington and one where I'm not ... worried about, 'do I have the money to actually mount the response we need,'" Wiesman told lawmakers.

Currently, Wiesman said, Washington's Department of Health is spending \$60,000 a day responding to coronavirus. Local public health agencies, most notably in King and Snohomish Counties where the confirmed cases are located, are also expending funds.

Total spending since Washington's first case was detected in January has been estimated at \$3.5 million.

In response to the request, state Sen. Steve O'Ban (<http://steveoban.src.wastateleg.org/>), the ranking Republican on the Health and Long Term Care Committee, introduced legislation (<http://steveoban.src.wastateleg.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2020/03/Coronavirus-bill-updated-1.pdf>) to take \$100 million from the state's constitutionally protected budget stabilization account.

"A public health crisis is exactly the kind of event that justifies dipping into the 'rainy day fund,'" O'Ban said in a statement.

A similar bill (<http://lawfilesextra.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/House%20Bills/2965.pdf?q=20200302143429>), with bipartisan sponsorship, has also been introduced in the Washington House.

Tapping the budget stabilization account requires a 60 percent vote of the Legislature. Gov. Jay Inslee previously proposed using those emergency funds to address the state's homelessness crisis.




Also on Monday, the Democratic chair of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, Christine Rolfes (<http://sdc.wastateleg.org/rolfes/>), indicated that she's considering whether the Legislature should pass a comprehensive coronavirus response bill.

The Washington Legislature is currently updating the state's biennial budget. Last week, the Washington Senate approved its version of the new spending plan (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=6168&Year=2019>). It included an additional \$10 million for coronavirus response.

On Saturday, Inslee declared a state of emergency (<https://www.governor.wa.gov/news-media/inslee-issues-covid-19-emergency-proclamation>) in response to the coronavirus outbreak.

*\*This story has been updated.*

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