

Altria CEO Howard Willard contracts coronavirus, takes medical leave

 [reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-altria/altria-ceo-howard-willard-contracts-coronavirus-takes-medical-leave-idUSKBN2171DD](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-altria/altria-ceo-howard-willard-contracts-coronavirus-takes-medical-leave-idUSKBN2171DD)

(Reuters) - Marlboro cigarette maker Altria Group Inc (MO.N) Chief Executive Officer Howard Willard has contracted coronavirus, the first top boss in corporate America publicly known to have the rapidly spreading infection, and is taking temporary medical leave.

Chief Financial Officer William Gifford Jr is taking over in his absence, according to a staff memo disclosed in a regulatory filing on Friday.

"Howard has been out of the office for several days, and we have notified those who were in close contact with Howard and asked them to self-quarantine for 14 days," the memo said [here](#)

The company did not immediately respond to a request for additional details on how or when Willard, 56, contracted the virus.

From movie actor Tom Hanks and NBA player Kevin Durant to Sophie Trudeau, wife of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the global pandemic has infected more than 245,000 people, killed over 10,000 and upended the lives of millions.

Earlier this month, Britain's BT Group (BT.L) said its chief executive, Philip Jansen, tested positive for COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

Altria and thousands of companies have been hit hard by the virus. It suspended operations at a manufacturing facility in Richmond, Virginia, after a second employee tested positive for the virus.

Altria was already facing hurdles, mostly tied to its 35% stake in Juul Labs Inc, which has dwindled in value since several bans on e-cigarettes were carried out following a surge in teenage vaping and reported health-linked concerns.

Altria in February said Willard will not receive an annual incentive award as a result of its souring minority investment in Juul.

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