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Promoting an Optimal State of Wellness in Lake County

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Moving Forward with Recovery Efforts in Lake County

Gary Pace MD, MPH

Lake County, CA (May 14, 2020) – Last Friday, Governor Newsom announced the entire state could progress to Stage 2 (“Lower risk workplaces”) of California’s COVID-19 Response “Resilience Roadmap” (<https://covid19.ca.gov/roadmap/>). This action marked a major step toward people getting out of their homes and back to work. Seeing progress being made toward responsible reopening, I decided to align our local orders directly with the Governor’s.

Until further notice, the statewide “Stay at Home” Order remains in effect, meaning local residents continue to be expected to shelter-in-place, except for certain allowable activities. Non-essential travel is not yet permitted. <https://covid19.ca.gov/stay-home-except-for-essential-needs/>

Recent changes did facilitate three new areas of local opportunity: Lake County waterways are now open without restriction (except for appropriate social distancing); low risk retail businesses can open for phone and online sales with curbside pickup; and each county can attest to their readiness for businesses in later phases of Stage 2 to reopen, and reopen at the rate that best fits their circumstances.

The State’s assignment of industries to the various Stages of the roadmap was done in consideration of broad social import and network effects (for example, childcare adds a level of risk of COVID-19 spread, but it must be more available for workers to be able to report as their offices reopen).

However, Stage 2 businesses are generally considered low-risk in terms of social mixing, and those eligible to reopen in later phases of Stage 2 include:

- Destination retail, including shopping malls and swap meets.
- Personal services, limited to: car washes, pet grooming, tanning facilities, and landscape gardening.
- Office-based businesses (telework remains strongly encouraged)
- Dine-in restaurants (not gaming areas or bars)
- Outdoor museums and open gallery places
- Government offices that were deemed non-essential
- Some children’s activities and childcare

Stages 3 (“higher-risk workplaces”) and 4 (“end of stay home order”) will include businesses that encourage more contact and travel.

Stage 2 **does not include:**

- Hotels and lodging for leisure and tourism
- Nightclubs, concert venues, festivals, theme parks
- Religious services and cultural ceremonies
- Entertainment venues—movies and gaming
- Personal services (cosmetology, hair salons, etc.)
- Hospitality such as bars and lounges
- Indoor museums, kids museums, gallery spaces, and libraries
- Community centers including public pools, playgrounds, picnic areas

Lake County has begun the process to apply for a “Local Variance” to the Governor’s Orders, which would provide the opportunity to accelerate the later phases of Stage 2 reopening. To be eligible, certain public health benchmarks must be met (stable number of cases, no new deaths, capacity to test and protect people if there is a surge in cases). We must also affirm there is a thoughtful plan in place on how to open the businesses. As local Public Health Officer, it will ultimately be my responsibility to Attest to our readiness to reopen, but the process to get to that point is collaborative, including engagement with local government and healthcare stakeholders.

Because we recently reopened local waterways, including the nationally prominent and regionally popular Clear Lake, we need to ensure there is not a surge in cases in the 10-14 days following that reopening. Hopefully, people have been continuing to maintain social distancing, using face coverings, and not traveling—these are going to be the things that keep us safe as we move forward to reopen. If cases start rising, it will slow down the progress we can make in reopening businesses.

The proposal for accelerating reopening in Lake County is being actively developed this week. We plan to present it to the Board of Supervisors Tuesday, May 19, and if everything stays stable, we’ll submit it to the State by the end of that week.

The first day of the new openings will most probably be the Tuesday following Memorial Day weekend, May 26. This step will be a partial opening of businesses, with the full opening of Stage 2-approved businesses to occur no sooner than two weeks later, in order to make sure there continues to be no surge in cases.

We are aware approximately 20 counties around the state have already submitted their applications for accelerated reopening, but we live next to two counties that continue to have new cases. Sonoma County documents between 5-15 new cases every day, and both Sonoma and Napa had a COVID-related death this week. Travel between our counties for work and shopping is very common, and we need to be particularly careful not to allow the virus to get a firm foothold and start spreading throughout Lake County. The main tools we have to prevent this are: restricting movement, testing, and helping people to isolate when they test positive.

We aim to move forward carefully, in an effort to balance opening for business with protecting the community from widespread infection. When the Local Variance takes effect, masks will be required in business and offices, for both workers and patrons. As movement increases, and fewer people are staying home, it is almost certain COVID-19 will enter our communities. We will need to institute and maintain protections, to help slow the spread.

Businesses eligible to reopen will self-certify their compliance with social distancing and other protocols. Guidance and Self-Certification forms are available at: <http://health.co.lake.ca.us/Coronavirus/Businesses.htm>

Statewide industry-specific guidance is also available here: <https://covid19.ca.gov/industry-guidance/>

Business owners are the experts on the services they provide, and we expect they will want to keep the public safe. Eligible businesses in Stage 2 will need to have plans and post the plans at their entry. Masks will need to be a part of the plan:

<http://health.co.lake.ca.us/Assets/Departments/Health/Public+Health+Division/COVID-19/COVID-19+Reopening+Plan+Form.pdf>

If there are complaints from the public about businesses not following good, safe practices, inspectors will visit, and help make the space safe. If repeated efforts to educate are not successful, fines may result.

We will be watching closely, to make sure public health is not suffering due to these changes. If the number of cases starts to rise, if there are significant outbreaks in vulnerable groups, or if area hospitals start getting overwhelmed, we will be forced to add restrictions back in, or even go completely back to sheltering-in-place. These strategies are successful, as evidenced in other parts of the country and world, and will be reinstated, if needed.

This is a new chapter for us in the response to this pandemic. We appreciate the high level of cooperation in the county, and we realize this has been a very difficult time. Particularly as we loosen restrictions, it is essential that people:

- Maintain social distancing and keep good hygiene
- It remains strongly recommended that people wear masks when out.
- Vulnerable populations (over 65 and/or with chronic medical conditions) should continue to stay safe at home.
- We discourage people from crossing county lines, since this is an important way that the virus spreads.

For Lake County-specific Coronavirus information, please continue to visit the Lake County Health Services Department's website, <http://health.co.lake.ca.us>.

The Lake County Coronavirus Response Hub has additional valuable resources: <https://lake-co-ca-coronavirus-response-lakecoca.hub.arcgis.com/>

If you still have questions, send an email request: MHOAC@lakecountyca.gov.

You can also call during business hours: 707-263-8174

We really want to move forward in a safe and thoughtful way, allowing people more social and economic opportunities without risking public health. Thank you for doing your part!

Gary Pace MD, MPH