



COUNTY OF DEL NORTE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
PUBLIC HEALTH BRANCH

400 L Street
Crescent City, California 95531

Phone
(707) 464-0861

Heather Snow, Director
Warren Rehwaldt, M.D., Public Health Officer

Fax
(707) 465-6701

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: 4/20/2020

SUBJECT: To Del Norte County Residents,

A few words to begin the week about COVID-19. If you have been checking the website, we still have had only two confirmed cases, with almost 250 tests done. Obviously we are still in a good place with this virus in terms of activity. Not so good in terms of supplies for testing and protection, but we have seen some signs of improvement on that front as well. The big issue this last week was that the Federal government documents were released by the White House regarding the broad outline of re-opening of the country.

What matters most is how that would apply here, especially in view of efforts at the state level. The Federal plan has some preconditions written into the plan (called "gating criteria") most of which we, in Del Norte, already meet. We are short on the testing criteria that were supposed to have in place, but otherwise the criteria are met.

Mostly this is the current scenario because we have had so few cases. We have had COVID-19 show up on our doorstep but it seems to have stopped there, at least for the moment. There are a lot of small counties around the state that are in the same boat. We in Public Health all agree that this phenomenon in our small counties is good fortune for us, and is the result of the mandated orders at the state level. And obviously, the criteria for us to try and get back to some semblance of normal may be a bit different compared to some large communities' south of us. The key thing for all of us to remember is that whatever time this can start, and whatever stages are needed to do this safely, a lot of what we are doing right now needs to continue. The strategy to re-open business and social life in the middle of this pandemic has to include preserving the core life-saving features of the measures in place now, and incorporating them into routine daily life going forward. We have to create and continue a safe "new normal" of how businesses can function and how social interaction can occur.

The key principles are as follows;

- 1) Social distance-maintaining the mindset of preserving physical distance between people of at least 6 feet at all times. Of all the measures, this is the most important.
- 2) Strict "stay-at-home" rules when people are sick with cold or flu symptoms. The flip side of this is that persons who are elderly and/or at high risk need to stay at home by virtue of continuing sheltering in place. That is a hard pill to swallow, but it's the most important measure that they can do to protect themselves.

3) Face coverings will need to be mandatory and will become the new normal. Ordinary speech and breathing can spread the virus a short range, but sneezes or coughs can double or triple that distance. Face coverings of any kind will reduce all these effects. Face coverings also reduce virus transmission for an infected individual who's not aware of their infection as they are having symptoms, or have not yet developed any symptoms.

4) Contact precautions in the real world-that means avoiding touching anything that could be touched by others without proper hand washing or hand sanitizing, and to properly clean such surfaces; this is essential in public spaces. This is as important as social physical distance, and takes on even greater importance when all the above measures are also in place.

Anyone who has looked at the documents from the White House last week has seen that these basic requirements are baked in already, although in somewhat different language. The theme is the same-the new normal of what we have required or recommended everyone to do is going to continue, no matter what. As we have said over and over again, these simple measures are the best protection from the virus, and it has turned out that they are the best means of controlling it as well. This is what we have to get used to, and keep doing. How long? The short answer is, "as long as it takes." The real answer is at least until this time next year, and maybe longer. Under the best of circumstances, it will be that long for community immunity to build up, or for vaccines to be developed, and distributed.

But things will not have to be the same as they are now. A lot of businesses have already adapted to these principles and many more will be able to do so very quickly-changes in the way they do things, or the way their space is used will have to happen, but they will be able to operate. And that will be a good thing. We are all already tired of "shelter in place", including me. I want to be able to go to a theater, or my favorite restaurants, and I would love to be able to travel again. But since I know what this virus is capable of, I am more than happy to wait. We never, ever want to see how bad it could be with this virus or take any chance of going there. If there is anyone out there who doubts this, they should look back on the news feeds from the hotspots around the world and nation that teetered on the edge of calamity-places like Northern Italy, or Madrid, or New York City.

As much as we would like to start implementing changes right now, the reality is that we are legally bound to enforce the Governor's directives as long as they are in effect. What we can do right now is start planning, and being innovative and creative, so that we can be ready when we are given the green light. Everybody with an interest in this, (which is a lot of people in this county) should look at the White House documents as a place to start, and start thinking about what they as an employer, or sole proprietor, or even an employee can start planning to do differently to meet the terms of the plan. We will get more detail from the State level in the coming days and weeks, but I think the basic requirements are going to be very similar. After all, this is not rocket science-this is the "flu rules" on steroids for an unusually long "season". And we all need to remember, we are doing this to protect people-parents, grandparents, friends; anyone who is at high risk of dying-we all have a stake in this to make it turn out right.

Dr. Warren Rehwaldt
Del Norte County Public Health Officer
Dept. of Health and Human Services
Public Health Branch
707-464-0861