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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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SUBJECT: To Del Norte County Residents,

As we approach completing a second month of “shelter-in-place” mode there is a lot of news to cover. As you probably all know, the Governor’s office along with the State Health Department (CDPH) have made it possible for small county jurisdictions like ours to “attest” to readiness to move early into Stage 2 of reopening of California. Among other things, this allows many restaurants to reopen their doors for indoor dining, and some retail establishments, all with COVID-19 precautions in place. We submitted our statement to the State Health Department attesting our readiness to proceed on Thursday May 14th. We were happy to receive word the next day that we had been approved.

So, this means that businesses that are described in the Stage 2 section of the California reopening plan can prepare a plan to describe how they are going to conduct business in the new COVID-19 environment that includes protection for workers and customers. As part of our plan sent to the state, we divided the business eligibility into two sections to ease the transition. Starting this week, (if people have made a workable plan and delivered it to us) restaurants can open for indoor dining (again, with lots of precautions). Also on the first list are daycares, thrift stores, clothing stores, furniture stores, auto dealerships (all with lots of recommendations), as well as landscapers, pet groomers, tanning facilities, golf, and office-based business. For the owners and operators, there are references to set up their particular business in a new way, that can often be found on the CDPH website, as well as references from the Del Norte Economic Resiliency Team, who have worked very hard to prepare for this day, and have pulled together a lot of resources for businesses to help with their planning. We have prepared a standard checklist that owners can apply to any business, and for many business categories CDPH has a guidance checklist as well. We are asking everyone to use them, as those are the best way for us to assess the plan they want to use. If there is any doubt about what standard to reach, we recommend the CDPH guidance.

The second set of business and activities (which we called Cohort 2 of Stage 2) are eligible about June 3 and include car washes, “destination” retail (which for us includes everything else not mentioned above), dental offices, summer camps, and schools. Obviously, schools in general are not able to reopen this late in the school year. We divided the items to allow us to consider the addition of a special request from CDPH, but the reason for that request dissipated last week. Thus, we are reserving the option of moving some of these in Cohort 2 ahead to Cohort 1, so that we can treat people fairly. Specifically, dental offices have a priority, but their requirements are more complicated than most, and we need to make sure they have everything they need before they can safely reopen.

All of the listed businesses are what CDPH put together as available to open early, ahead of much of the rest of the state. We didn't make up the list but we will adhere to it. Anything not on the list must wait for their turn at a later stage of the California reopening plan. We can't ask for any more "relaxation" of these rules.

There was an item of scary news for parents this week, with the reports out of New York and elsewhere of the cases of "Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children related to COVID-19" (MIS-C for short). A few kids have shown up to hospitals with rash, fever (especially sustained fever), red eyes, swollen and red hands, and red cracked lips, and they seem to have a severe reaction to being ill with the virus, at least most of the time. Some have been quite ill, and needed critical care and several children died. A lot of the symptoms suggest Kawasaki disease, which is a rare inflammatory condition that sometimes affects the heart and arteries of kids as they recover from an illness, and has long been thought to be related to a virus or viruses. Kawasaki disease was first identified in 1967, so we have known of the disorder for a long time. We don't know the connection, if any, between the new condition and Kawasaki disease, but in these challenging times, people need to know what to look for. It seems as though the new condition is also very rare, which is a good thing, but if a child develops this version of the COVID-19 infection, they would need to be in a major hospital that can take care of children who are very sick.

Also, a few reminders of what we have learned since this nasty virus crossed to our borders. We knew about fever, cough and shortness of breath as symptoms of COVID-19 before it arrived in the United States, but other symptoms have become quite prominent with the virus. People should watch out for symptoms of a stomach flu (diarrhea, vomiting) headache, body aches, chills, sore throat, and loss of taste and smell. This last one, the loss of taste and smell, is unusual in most respiratory infections, and really should prompt someone to get themselves checked out. We have much better testing capacity in the county now, and there is a new quick test site in Eureka that we mentioned last time, that is now up and running and available if people are having trouble getting in to a doctor locally. It's not a drive up, but close to it-you can make an appointment by calling or going on line, and it is free for those who are uninsured. We are going to be working this next week to see if there is a way to get part of this service split off and available at least a few days a week, here in Del Norte itself. Humboldt Public Health has been very helpful and generous in promoting this testing site for residents other than their own, so hats off to them.

We also want to remind people the most important thing of all-moving to this new stage relaxes the stay at home order, but does not eliminate it. This is especially true for those families with high risk persons in the home and those who are over 65. These are the people we need to protect the most, and for them and the families that live with them, sheltering in place is the best protection. "High risk" can include a lot of conditions. Among the ones we worry about the most are diabetes, obesity, heart disease, chronic liver and kidney disease, chronic lung disease, immune disorders, the list is long. The important thing is that as the "shelter in place" gets relaxed the coronavirus activity is going to increase. Everyone with chronic disease at any age could have a tough time with this virus, those who are older will definitely have a tough time, and those who are over sixty-five, with health issues or not, may have the toughest time of all. For all of you who fit that bill, stay home and stay safe.

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