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SUBJECT: Letter from the Public Health Officer to Del Norte County Residents

To Del Norte Residents;

As you may have heard, the Governor's office in conjunction with the state health department has decided to relax restrictions on certain activities, including places of worship, religious services, and cultural ceremonies. They have decided to allow those services to proceed with social distancing, face coverings and the usual guidance about personal hygiene and cleaning, up to 25% capacity of a building or 100 attendees, whichever is lower. The same rule is applied to protest events and political rallies.

This means that with **plans in place to offer protection for their members**, places of worship can reopen without fear of any theoretical reprimand from state or local government. In truth, we at public health have no interest in reprimands-we simply want to protect the people of this county. I think this is good news overall, but I am going to be up front and honest about the risk. Putting protection measures in place was going to be a requirement from us no matter when the rule about worship services was relaxed, and we still consider them to be a very high-risk situation, mostly because so many places of worship in our community have a lot of elderly persons in their congregations. For those who will be planning the design of a reopened worship service, please pay attention to the guidance document from the State Health Department (CDPH), as it lays out the basics of what should happen. And, to all of those that are at highest risk, especially the elderly, you may want to continue joining services by video, if that is available. There just is no safe zone out there, with virus activity at its current level.

And that level has definitely picked up. We have had an uptick in virus reports over the last week and a half, which is probably for multiple reasons-we have a diverse community but with a lot of links, and our case contact investigations are revealing this fact to be true. We also have had some laxity in people staying home and truly sheltering in place, and the guard has been let down. Finally, we are seeing first hand the reality of how this virus moves-at least ½ of the new cases are tests that were directed by us, during the case investigations and about half of them are in persons who were not having symptoms. I am going to say that again -they were NOT having symptoms.

And this is why we have imposed a mandatory face-covering order, at least for indoors and in public places. There is clearly some better data available now that supports the mandatory use indoors, to cut

down on transmission of the virus. It's really very simple-if you cover your face you are less likely to spread the virus when you are sick, **but more importantly, before you realize that you are sick, and it is clear that a lot of virus is spread by people who do not know that they are sick.** We are seeing this over and over again, as we track cases in the community.

I can't emphasize it enough, so I am going to say it again and again-the high risk people in our community need to continue to shelter in place. There is no better solution. We can do all sorts of messages and write orders for all sorts of restrictions, but the best thing of all is for the high risk people in our community to stay home and ride this one out to the finish. Wait for a vaccine, only go out if you need to, stay in touch with friends and family by video and take no chances.

Who is high risk? It depends on the individual sometimes, but certainly anyone over 65, regardless of their health status, and many people in their 40s and 50s who have chronic health conditions. Even younger persons, especially diabetics and people who struggle with obesity can have significantly higher risk. Most young people are healthy enough to shrug this off, but young persons (e.g. 20-40 age group) make up about 20% of hospital admissions nationwide. If you aren't sure, ask your healthcare provider. If that is not an option, there is a FAQ section of the main page at the CDC Website that covers those at higher risk-the link is pasted below.<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/fag.html#Higher-Risk>. Essential employees should discuss their leave needs with their employer.

There is some other news this week that I should mention, as there will be cause for some celebration. Barbershops and hair salons are going to be allowed to open for those counties that have a variance status (which includes us). There is a guidance document posted at the CDPH website that details the requirements. Most services will be available, but there are exceptions-basically any cosmetic activity that would require a customer to remove a mask or face covering. Fortunately they are not requiring N95 masks for anyone-a simple cloth covering will do, for both practitioner and customer. We are requiring a plan to be submitted to us at our local health department, just as we are requiring plans for other businesses to reopen. This is a compromise and a test of sorts-we know that the potential for transmission is high in this type of setting, but the thought is that if people will pay attention to the need for masks/face coverings it can reduce that risk enough to proceed. We know that this industry has high safety standards in normal times and are used to conducting their business practices with that in mind. We believe that they will continue, and will do whatever is necessary to keep themselves and their customers safe. Nevertheless, for a high risk person, you may want to think twice about rushing in for that first haircut. There is simply no way to make the experience of going to a barber or salon completely safe.

And finally, one last message to small business owners; many of you have been turning in our business checklist for preparedness for the coronavirus, but have not turned in your personal business plan. The checklist is mostly for us, to be able to assess the plan that you are supposed to develop and turn in. The plan is the most important part, NOT the checklist. We want to see both, but the plan is the key element. And on top of this, most of the businesses that are now opening have a State Health Department guidance document and checklist to be referenced as well. We ask that all businesses use these documents to guide their plan, and the state health department checklists as well as ours. At the end, the state guidance is the minimum standard that we are required to use to judge a business's COVID-19 plan. If you need help, we have help! Go to the following website to get the assistance that you need;
<https://www.preparedelnorte.com/covid-19-business-support>

Businesses that currently may self-certify to reopen upon submitting the COVID-19 Operations Plan are follows:

- a. Medical Offices: Elective surgeries may resume service under the advised guidelines and current recommendations from CDC and CDPH.
- b. Clothing Stores: Clothing-thrift stores, and fashion stores can reopen with limits on customers per hour, with social distancing in lines and entrances. In-store fittings would be discouraged, and home fittings that are returned would be shelved for a minimum of 3 days. Thrift donations should be set aside and “aged” at normal temperature and humidity for at least 5 days to avoid persistent virus contamination.
- c. Furniture: Furniture stores can re-open with appointment only and social distance-no sales from the floor; warehouse only, unless a floor item can be held in the warehouse for at least 5 days.
- d. Auto dealers: Auto dealers may resume sales, with appointments only and social distancing design of offices and showrooms. Social distance rules to be applied both inside and outside.
- e. Daycare: Daycare can resume with protective masks for staff. Recommend smallest management groups in shared space, with child group cohorts.
- f. Parks: Golf courses, non-congregate portions of public parks and trails may open, but services are limited and social distancing strictly maintained.
- g. Offices: Office-based businesses may reopen, though telework is strongly encouraged.
- h. Landscape gardening
- i. Pet-grooming
- j. Tanning facilities

“Self certify” means that they have taken the initial steps of writing and implementing a plan. **Once their plan is submitted, along with state and local checklists** they can download a “self certified” poster for their door or window. When we have reviewed and approved their **complete** plan, they can receive a second poster from our department, stating that it has been reviewed. After that, somewhere down the road, we will walk through those businesses and use their checklists to see how well they are managing in a COVID world. We hope to be able to offer some pointers, and help them fine tune their prevention plans, but even better, we hope to not have to say anything at all, because they are doing everything they said they would.

As we noted, the State of California has now potentially added hair salons and barbershops for counties like ours, and is allowing retail establishments and places of worship (with proper plans in place) for the entire state. There are, however, some businesses and community events that are not yet on the table. We will, along with the rest of the state, need to see what develops over the upcoming weeks to decide on the next steps. In the meantime, if you are a small business owner in Del Norte, get your plan written up, and get it and the checklists sent in to us so we can review what you have done and intend to do. We want to help you succeed and stay safe!