Burgum announces move to next phase of ND Smart Restart plan

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BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Doug Burgum today announced North Dakota is moving to the next phase of its ND Smart Restart plan, as the state continues to see a high rate of testing per capita, a low positive test rate and adequate hospital capacity to handle potential surges in COVID-19 cases.

The North Dakota Department of Health today confirmed 40 additional cases of COVID-19 out of 2,894 total tests completed, beating the previous record of 2,861 tests on May 15. The positive rate of 1.4 percent also was the lowest since May 17.

With 89 newly recovered cases today, the number of active cases decreased to 579, representing .08 percent of North Dakota's population, and down from 648 active cases two weeks ago. Even in Cass County, the state's most active county for COVID-19 cases, active cases represent just one-quarter of 1 percent of the population, and the state knows the most about the cases there due to targeted testing and contact tracing by the Red River Valley COVID-19 Task Force, Burgum noted.

"North Dakotans have done a great job exercising individual responsibility to slow the spread of the coronavirus, putting our state in a position to be able to further reopen our economy with a thoughtful, common-sense approach focused on saving lives and livelihoods," Burgum said. "With our increased capacity giving us more confidence to test, trace and isolate positive cases, we are ready to enter the next stage of the ND Smart Restart."

Under the color-coded health guidance system in the ND Smart Restart plan, the change announced today moves the state out of the yellow, or moderate, risk level, and into the green, or low-risk, level – one level before the blue "new normal" level.

With the move from the moderate to low risk level:

- The recommendation for capacity in bars and restaurants increases from 50 percent to 75 percent.
- The recommendation for banquets/weddings increases from 50 percent occupancy up to 250 attendees, to 75 percent occupancy up to 500 attendees.

- Recommended movie theater capacity increases from 20 percent to 65 percent.
- Fitness centers may consider holding classes with high inhalation/exhalation exchange with social distancing, whereas those classes were not recommended under the yellow level.

Burgum reiterated that the ND Smart Restart protocols are recommendations under Executive Order 2020-06.7, and North Dakotans are strongly encouraged to follow them. Businesses and organizations may move forward under the guidelines based on their own comfort level and ability to meet the recommended protocols.

North Dakota has completed 89,599 tests of North Dakotans and has tested 69,453 unique North Dakotans, resulting in a total of 2,520 positive cases and the third-highest per-capita testing rate in the nation. The state has reported 59 deaths of individuals with COVID-19, including two reported today – a woman in her 90s and a man in his 70s, both from Cass County and both with underlying health conditions. Burgum expressed his condolences to their families and the loved ones of all those who have been lost through the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirty-six people remain hospitalized.

For more information on the state's COVID-19 response, visit www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus or www.ndresponse.gov.

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