Burgum to lower statewide COVID-19 risk level from high to moderate, increase capacity limits

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BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Doug Burgum today announced he will sign an amended executive order lowering North Dakota's statewide risk level for COVID-19 from high risk (orange) to moderate risk (yellow) and increasing the capacity limits for restaurants, bars and gatherings as active cases and hospitalizations due to COVID-19 have decreased in North Dakota.

Bars, restaurants and other food service establishments have been operating at up to 50 percent of their licensed seated capacity, not to exceed 150 patrons, since Nov. 16. The capacity limits were one of several mitigation measures announced Nov. 13 to slow the spread of COVID-19 as active cases and hospitalizations were peaking.

Under the amended executive order, these establishments will be able to start operating at 65 percent of licensed facility capacity, not to exceed 200 patrons, beginning 8 a.m. Jan. 8. Seating arrangements and tables must still allow for at least 6 feet of physical distance between individual parties; dance areas must be closed; service must be provided to seated patrons only; and masks must be worn by owners, managers and employees at all times, and by patrons except when eating or drinking.

In addition, banquet, ballroom and event venues, which have been limited to 25 percent capacity since Nov. 16, will be able to start operating at 50 percent capacity as of 8 a.m. Jan. 8, not to exceed the ND Smart Restart capacity limits, which will be updated later today.

A State Health Officer order requiring face coverings to be worn in indoor businesses and

indoor public settings, as well as outdoor public settings where physical distancing isn't possible, remains in effect until 12:01 a.m. Jan. 18.

In conjunction with today's announcement, Burgum strongly encouraged communities to take advantage of the state's ample supply of BinaxNOW rapid tests, which deliver results in 15 minutes.

"As more and more businesses, communities, school districts and higher education institutions implement rapid testing, we can continue to screen out asymptomatic positives to break the chain of transmission, slow the spread and further open up restaurants, bars and event centers," Burgum said. "Successful deployment of vaccines and more widespread use of effective therapeutics also will help us preserve hospital capacity, protect the vulnerable and keep students learning in person."

Hospitalizations due to COVID-19 in North Dakota have decreased to 98 from more than 300 in mid-November, while active cases have decreased to 1,915 since peaking at over 10,200 on Nov. 13, according to the Department of Health. The state's 14-day rolling average positivity rate also has decreased from 16 percent to 4.4 percent since Nov. 17.

State officials are closely monitoring the data for a potential post-holiday surge in COVID-19 cases and are concerned about possible cases being missed because of low levels of testing, and will continue to evaluate the current state risk level and look for opportunities to return to a more localized approach, including adjusting risk levels on a county-by-county basis To avoid another surge in cases and hospitalizations, residents are urged to physically distance, wear masks, wash hands, limit gatherings and take advantage of testing opportunities. Visit www.health.nd.gov/testnd for more information on testing times and locations.

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

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