With COVID-19 Cases Rising, Mills Administration Announces More Public Health and Safety Measures

November 19, 2020

Starting tomorrow, certain businesses statewide will close every day by 9:00 PM; Keep Maine Healthy Program Extended; Additional Walgreens Testing Sites Open

Following an alarming increase in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and positivity rates in the State of Maine, the Mills Administration today announced new measures to mitigate the spread of this deadly virus.

Beginning tomorrow, Friday, November 20, 2020, through Sunday, December 6, 2020, all outdoor and indoor amusement venues, movie theaters, performing arts venues, casinos, and businesses that provide seated food and drink service, including social clubs, restaurants, and bars and tasting rooms currently open for outdoor service, will close for the night by 9:00 p.m. This limit on hours is designed to limit extended gatherings at a time when many students and family members are returning to Maine and at a time when social gatherings are more common, both of which will likely lead to more COVID-19 transmission.

This latest measure is consistent with actions taken by other states, including Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, and New York, which require early business closures to minimize extended evening gatherings while preserving standard business operating hours.

> *"As we enter the colder months and a holiday season when we customarily gather with friends and family, we are also entering a new and dangerous phase of the pandemic," said Governor Mills. "Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have been performing a balancing act, basing our decisions on science and medical expertise, weighing the safety of reopening with the necessity of getting back to business. This targeted and temporary step will reduce extended gatherings while keeping the businesses open. Other steps may be necessary in the coming weeks if we do not get this virus under control. I ask all Maine people, please wear your face covering, wash your hands, watch your distance and avoid hosting or attending gatherings with friends and loved ones unless it is absolutely necessary. Returning to normal life sometime next year first requires us to survive the holidays this year."*

A previous Executive Order delegates authority to Commissioner Heather Johnson of the Department of Economic and Community Development and Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew of the Department of Health and Human Services, in consultation with the Maine CDC and the Attorney General's Office, to adjust public health and safety requirements contained in COVID-19 prevention checklists to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Checklists for Indoor Amusement; Outdoor Amusement; Movie Theaters; Performing Art Venues; Casinos and Seated Food and Drink Service have been updated to reflect this temporary change. All COVID-19 Prevention checklists can be viewed on the Department of Economic and Community Development's website.

On Thursday, Maine reported 215 new cases, 1 additional death, a woman in her forties, 88 current hospitalizations, and a seven-day test positivity rate of 2.66 percent.

"Every part of Maine is seeing community transmission," said Dr. Nirav D. Shah, Director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "Each of us can help limit further spread of the virus by considering how our actions affect others. Extended gatherings provide an opportunity for the virus to infect others. At this time of year, those others are more likely to be loved ones. By adjusting or delaying our shared celebrations, we deny the virus that opportunity and demonstrate our respect and care for others."

To ensure broad compliance with public health and safety measures that limit the spread of COVID-19, including wearing face coverings, avoiding gatherings, and maintaining physical distancing, the Mills Administration will also invest $100,000 in Coronavirus Relief Funds to extend its statewide Keep Maine Healthy public awareness campaign into January 2021 with social media, digital, television and streaming media advertising. DHHS launched the campaign in June to encourage Maine people to continue taking actions that are proven to limit the spread of COVID-19.

"The course that the COVID-19 pandemic takes in our state over the coming weeks and months is up to the people of Maine," said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew. "We know what works to limit the spread of this virus: wearing face coverings, avoiding gatherings, keeping distance, and washing our hands. This campaign will remind us of actions we can take to keep our loved ones and communities safe and healthy."

The Mills Administration is working with the Attorney General's Office to provide clear guidance to businesses on current public health requirements and their right to enforce those requirements to protect the health of their customers and staff. That guidance is forthcoming and will be released publicly.

Additionally, DHHS announced today that another 52 Walgreens pharmacies will begin offering free drive-through rapid COVID-19 antigen testing Friday to people in Maine experiencing symptoms of the virus. Three more Walgreens sites in southern Maine will begin offering antigen testing next week, bringing the total to 65 Walgreens sites throughout the state.

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