Mills Administration Continues Early Business Closing Time Amid Rising Cases, Hospitalizations

December 4, 2020

The Mills Administration announced today it will extend the requirement for certain businesses statewide to close by 9:00 p.m. through Sunday, January 3, 2021. The extension, which lasts beyond New Year's Eve, is aimed at limiting activities that lead to COVID-19 transmission, amid a sustained and dangerous increase in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and positivity rates in the State of Maine.

"It is too early to know the impact of the Thanksgiving holiday on the spread of COVID-19 in Maine, but with hundreds of people getting sick all across the state, and many more dying and so many receiving critical care in our overburdened hospitals, we cannot afford to let down our guard,"Governor Mills said. "This targeted step aims to limit evening gatherings in public settings where we know folks are more likely to let their guard down and expose themselves and others to this deadly virus. At the same time, this action allows businesses to stay open for the majority of their operating hours, as long as they comply with basic public health and safety measures. Of course, we are also cautioning against private gatherings as well. The fact is, any gathering of people for any reason, particularly without masking and social distancing, is a dangerous event. If we are not able to get this virus under control, other steps may be necessary. I ask all Maine people, please do your part. Don't take chances: wear your face covering, wash your hands, watch your distance and avoid gatherings. Getting back to normal sometime next year first requires us to survive the holidays this year."

Prior to Thanksgiving, the Mills Administration announced that 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, must close for the night by 9:00 p.m. through Sunday, December 6, 2020.

This limit on closing times is aimed at curbing extended evening gatherings during the holiday season when individuals, including students and family members returning to Maine from elsewhere, are more likely to lower their guard, particularly later in the evening, jeopardizing adherence to critical public health and safety guidelines.

"With increasing community transmission, we all need to take steps to deny the virus opportunities to harm our friends, family, and loved ones," said Dr. Nirav D. Shah, Director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "Delaying shared celebrations or adapting holiday traditions in ways that allow us to spread good cheer without spreading the virus can help ease stress on Maine's health care system and potentially save lives."

The early closure time, however, still allows these businesses to maintain some daytime operations. Curbside pick-up and delivery service are still permitted after 9:00 p.m. Early business closing times are in line with actions taken by other states, including Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, and New York.

Checklists for Indoor Amusement; Outdoor Amusement; Movie Theaters; Performing Art Venues; Casinos and Seated Food and Drink Service have been updated to reflect this change. All COVID-19 Prevention checklists can be viewed on the Department of Economic and Community Development's website.

As of today, the Mills Administration has committed $1,243,770,470 of the $1.25 billion in CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF), almost half of which has gone to support Maine businesses. Last week, the Mills Administration announced a $40 million Tourism, Hospitality and Retail Grant Program to specifically support Maine's tourism, hospitality, and retail small businesses. Businesses can apply for relief on the Department of Economic and Community Development website.

The program builds on the Mills Administration's support for Maine businesses and employees, which includes a commitment of $295 million to backfill Maine's Unemployment Trust Fund to support Maine businesses amidst the increased demand for unemployment benefits, as well as $8.5 million to support childcare services so Maine people can go back to work. Earlier this year, at the request of Governor Mills, the Small Business Administration allowed Maine businesses to apply for economic support loans. Additionally, the Governor and the Legislature worked together in a bipartisan manner to establish a consumer loan guarantee program through FAME, in partnership with financial institutions, to provide low- or no- interest loans for eligible people in Maine.

On Friday, December 4, 2020, Maine reported 290 new cases, 4 additional deaths, 164 hospitalizations, and a seven-day test positivity rate of 4.87 percent.

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