Governor Mills Unveils Plan to Protect Public Health, Support Maine's Economy During Upcoming Tourism Season

March 5, 2021

Moving Maine Forward plan maintains critical public health measures, establishes clear timeframes, simplifies and standardizes protocols, and updates travel policies to prepare for Maine's busy tourism season as vaccinations progress

Governor Janet Mills today unveiled a plan to protect public health and support Maine's economy as the state approaches its busy spring and summer tourism season.

The Moving Maine Forward plan maintains critical health and safety protocols that have protected Maine people over the past year, establishes a clear timeframe to increase capacity limits to support economic activity, and standardizes these limits across sectors by transitioning to a simple model based on percentage of capacity. The plan also revises Maine's travel policies established last summer under the Keep Maine Healthy Program and sets a target reopening date of March 26 for indoor service at bars.

The new, multi-month plan, which reflects the stabilization of Maine's COVID-19 metrics and progress in vaccinations, aims to provide clarity and predictability for Maine people and businesses to plan for the summer months and establish Maine as a safe place to visit.

> *"Public health and economic health go hand-in-hand – and this plan aims to achieve both,"* ***said Governor Janet Mills****. "By maintaining proven health measures, providing straightforward protocols, and establishing clear timeframes, this plan will protect the health of Maine people and visitors alike and support Maine's economy during our critical tourism season."*
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> *"Additional gatherings, travel, and business engagement will be possible with continued implementation of the public health protocols combined with increased rates of vaccination,"* ***said Jeanne Lambrew, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services****. "That said, COVID-19 has been hard to predict, so we will closely monitor trends and make adjustments if necessary."*
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> *"We recognize the impact the pandemic has had on service industries,"* s***aid Heather Johnson, Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development.*** *"We hope that this framework helps businesses safely plan a tourism season that keeps their employees and Maine people safe while allowing their businesses a financial path forward."*
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> *"HospitalityMaine is incredibly excited for these changes, which will help support our industry during the important months ahead,"* ***said Greg Dugal, Director of Government Affairs for HospitalityMaine.*** *"We look forward to continuing to work with the Governor to make this a successful and safe tourism season for Maine people, visitors, and businesses alike."*
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> *"We are very pleased that retail and other businesses will be able to increase our capacity limits in the coming weeks and months,"* ***said Curtis Picard, President and CEO of the Retail Association of Maine****.*

"This will help return us to some sense of normalcy, encourage safe travel to Maine this spring and summer, and continue to balance public health with economic recovery."

"Throughout the pandemic, one of the most significant challenges for the tourism industry has been uncertainty about what the future holds. Early spring is a critical time for our businesses as we begin to gear up for what we hope is once again our busy season. A clear understanding of what the travel guidelines are and what capacity limitations will be heading into spring and summer is tremendously helpful," ***said Tony Cameron, Chief Executive Officer of the Maine Tourism Association****. "So many of our tourism businesses continue to struggle, all while hoping that the coming summer will put them on a solid path to recovery. Governor Mills' announcement today is a big step forward for all of us. MTA looks forward to continuing to work with the Governor and her Administration as we seek to balance public health and economic health."*

"We are excited to see the changes coming from the Governer's office today," ***said Kerrie Tripp, Executive Director of the Greater Bangor Convention and Visitors Bureau.*** *"Travel, tourism, and entertainment have been hit extremely hard during the pandemic and these changes allow us to plan for the future and will hopefully allow more Mainers in our industry to get back to work."*

"This is great news for our tourism businesses and the state's economy," ***said Lynn Tillotson, President and CEO Visit Portland****. "As a destination marketing organization we are incredibly excited to begin promoting Greater Portland and the great state of Maine to visitors."*

The Moving Maine Forward Plan is composed of the following three tenets:

Maintaining Critical Public Health Protocols: The plan maintains the critical public health and safety protocols – like wearing face coverings, keeping physical distance, and conducting enhanced cleaning – implemented in part throughCOVID-19 Prevention Checklists and requirements for Maine schools. These industry-specific protocols, which are critical to keeping business and school operations safe for Maine people, will remain in effect throughout the summer.

Simplifying & Standardizing Capacity Limits and Establishing A Clear Timeframe: The plan transitions Maine's capacity limits from hard caps in most situations to a straightforward percentage of capacity model consistent across all sectors. It also establishes a clear timeframe to increase these capacity limits, providing Maine businesses with predictability to plan. The timeframe and capacity adjustments are as follows:

- For indoor gatherings, the percentage of capacity will increase to 50 percent starting March 26 and 75 percent starting May 24.
- For outdoor gatherings, the percentage of capacity will increase to 75 percent starting March 26 and 100 percent starting May 24.
- Those businesses that have more capacity under the current policy (50 people for indoor gatherings; 100 people for outdoor gatherings; or 5 people per 1,000 square feet) are permitted to maintain that standard until May 24.

Further, these new capacity targets can be dialed down – for example, from 75 percent capacity to 50 percent capacity – if Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) determines hospital capacity is at risk or if a new variant strain poses a significant risk to public health in Maine.

The plan also establishes a target reopening date of March 26, 2021 for Maine bars and tasting rooms which will be required to operate under the Seated Food and Drink COVID-19 Checklist.

Updating Maine's Travel Policy: Last summer, through its Keep Maine Healthy Program, Maine was one of the first states to implement a test or quarantine requirement, a policy replicated by a substantial number of states. This new plan updates and targets Maine's travel policy through both immediate and long-term updates that reflect changes since last summer, most notably including the introduction of vaccines.

Effective immediately, the plan:

- Adds Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island to the list of states exempt from the test or quarantine requirement. New Hampshire and Vermont had previously been exempt. These states have reduced their positivity and active case rates.

- Exempts those who have either recently had COVID-19 or been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, regardless of their state of origin, from the test or quarantine requirement. Federal requirements related to international travel, however, remain in effect.

Effective May 1 the plan:

- Shifts Maine's COVID-19 travel policy requirements from an "all states included, unless exempt" model to an "all states exempt, unless included" model. This means that travelers from all states are automatically exempt unless otherwise determined by the Maine CDC.
- Under this new model, the Maine CDC will be charged with identifying states that have a high prevalence of highly contagious COVID-19 variants. If one or more states see a spike in variant cases, Maine will apply its test or quarantine requirement to travelers to and from that state. This more targeted approach will remain in effect through the summer.

The introduction of the Moving Maine Forward plan comes after Governor Mills announced last week that Maine is adopting an age-based approach to expanding eligibility and, per a directive from the Biden Administration, is also making school staff and childcare providers eligible. The age-based approach maintains Maine's focus on saving the lives of the people who are most at risking of dying from COVID-19 and ensures that vaccine providers can efficiently and quickly vaccinate as many people as possible.

To date, Maine has administered 391,148 doses of COVID-19 vaccine. 253,135 people, or nearly 19 percent of residents, have gotten first doses and 138,013 people, or more than 10 percent of residents, have received final doses.

Despite having the oldest median age population in the country, Maine, adjusted for population, ranks second lowest in the nation in total hospitalizations, third lowest in total number of cases, and fourth lowest in number of deaths from COVID-19, according to the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. The state's seven-day testing volume is eighth best in the nation and the state's positivity rate over the past fourteen days is second lowest in the nation. Additionally, according to Moody's Analytics and CNN Business's "Back to Normal Index", Maine is best in New England, and 18th best in the nation, in returning to pre-pandemic economic activity.

Although vaccinations have begun, COVID-19 remains a serious public health threat and Maine people should continue to heed all health and safety protocols, including wearing masks, practicing physical distancing, and avoiding large gatherings.

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