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Governor, state officials detail crackdown on COVID-19

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Hotspot businesses to be temporarily closed; retail hours limited; safety requirements for food and drink establishments enhanced

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and state health and workplace safety officials on Tuesday announced new enhanced mitigation efforts to crack down on COVID-19 throughout New Mexico, a targeted and moderated approach that is intended to break the chain of escalating statewide infections and prevent the virus from overwhelming state hospitals without enacting wholesale business closings.

The governor and state officials were scheduled to present the information on the governor's Facebook page at 1 p.m. That update was delayed by unforeseen technical difficulties, which prevented the update from streaming live on the governor's Facebook page. The Governor's Office apologizes deeply for the difficulties and is working to resolve them.

The slides from the presentation are **available here**.

The governor and state health officials also on Tuesday re-emphasized the renewed directive that New Mexicans should **stay home** except for outings essential to health, safety and welfare to the greatest extent possible to help slow the incidence and spread of COVID-19. That directive has remained within the

successive iterations of the state emergency public health order all throughout the spring and summer months as it is the most effective tool for rapidly blunting the spread of the highly infectious virus.

The state of New Mexico last week experienced its worst week for COVID-19 infections throughout the duration of the pandemic, with the state's new rate of spread and new case rate ranking among the highest in the United States. The state's positivity rate, rolling average of new cases and COVID-19 hospitalizations have all spiked precipitously in October following steady increases over the month of September. State hospitals, which have seen a more than 100 percent increase in COVID-19 patients this month, have begun to experience strain; 81 percent of the state's adult general hospital beds as of Oct. 20 are occupied, and 71 percent of the state's ICU beds as of Oct. 20 are occupied, according to the New Mexico Department of Health.

The state's newest mitigation efforts include an enhanced strategy for enforcing safety requirements at food and drink establishments offering limited indoor-dining options, a targeting of higher-risk hotspot places of business reporting clusters of infections and a statewide mandatory closing time for retail entities among other measures.

"This last week has been scary," said Gov. Lujan Grisham. "It's been unsettling and upsetting to see everybody's hard work and sacrifice undone in only a few short weeks. That is the awful, relentless nature of this virus, this invisible enemy of ours. And when we begin talking about straining our state hospital capacity – when we talk about the availability of beds, of health care workers to treat New Mexicans in need – we are talking about a crisis that would unequivocally lead to more significant illness and more needless death in our state. We cannot afford to take that risk lightly. We must not panic, and we must act.

"None of us want to hunker back down," added the governor, "but practicing social distancing and wearing our masks and staying home whenever we can is the best public health tool we have to protect our state and our health care workers and hospitals. It's incumbent upon all of us to take those steps. The quicker we all act, the more united we are in our action, the quicker we will get through to the other side of this wave, and the sooner it will be safer again to spend socially-distant time outside with loved ones and friends. My administration will continue our outreach to cities and counties statewide to talk about the importance of enforcement and proactive measures that encourage New Mexicans to limit their time outside the home and to engage in only the safest behaviors in public and around others.

"We know shuttering businesses statewide would be devastating economically for our state. I am determined to avoid that untenable scenario, if we can, and so I am determined to try aggressive and strategic mitigation before reaching for that

emergency measure. We know a lot more about this virus than we did earlier this year. We know that spending time indoors when not at home is a primary vector for transmission. We know that spaces where individuals cannot wear masks – such as food and drink establishments – enhance the risk of transmission. We know out-of-state travel enhances the risk of transmission. And we know that ten cases become one hundred and one hundred become one thousand very, very quickly. That's why we are targeting the areas where risk is greatest and where cases are piling up – and hopefully we can sustain workers and livelihoods and beat back this virus and buy much-needed time for our health care system as we once again flatten the curve and stabilize the public health conditions in New Mexico."

The state will later this week issue an extended emergency public health order effective Friday, Oct. 23, which incorporates the following amendments intended to root out and prevent the incidence and spread of COVID-19 at locations identified as sources of possible exposure:

- Businesses that incur four rapid responses – which occur when an employer reports, as required, an incidence of COVID-19 in the workplace to the state Environment Department, which oversees state occupational health and safety efforts – over a two-week period will be required to close for two weeks.
    - This closure requirement will apply to food and drink establishments, close-contact businesses, retail spaces, places of lodging and other places of business presenting an extreme public health risk as determined by the Department of Health.

- All retail establishments must close by 10 p.m. each night, in alignment with the state's requirement that food and drink establishments serving alcohol must close by 10 p.m.
    - Retail establishments are defined in the public health order as businesses selling goods or services directly to a customer and include grocery stores and "big box" stores.

- Food and drink establishments that complete the New Mexico Safe Certification training program, which educates workers about the state's required and recommended COVID-Safe Practices, may continue to offer limited indoor dining at a maximum of 25 percent occupancy as of Friday, Oct. 30. Food and drink establishments that are not New Mexico

Safe Certified as of Friday, Oct. 30, may continue to provide outdoor dine-in service at 75 percent of maximum occupancy with tables at least six feet apart among other required COVID-Safe Practices but may not provide indoor dine-in service.

- Restaurants wishing to continue limited indoor dining must consent, as part of the certification program, to spot testing of employees by the state Department of Health. The Department of Health will prioritize spot-testing for establishments in high-risk counties where the spread of the virus is greatest.

- Restaurants wishing to continue limited indoor dining must require customers who dine on-site to list their name and contact information in a logbook, and retain the information for no less than three weeks, to assist state regulators in contact-tracing efforts. Previously, this contribution to contact-tracing efforts was only recommended as part of the state's COVID-Safe Practices.

The state will also close state museums and historical sites effective Friday, Oct 23.

The new mitigation efforts are supplemental to the state's most recent enhanced regulations, which include a mandatory nightly closing time for food and drink establishments serving alcohol, a tighter limit on the number of people who may gather in one place and a reduced maximum occupancy for hotels and other places of lodging as a result of contact tracing identifying out-of-state travel as a top source of possible exposure.

Maximum occupancy restrictions remain in place for businesses and different industries and in-person entities statewide, as does the statewide requirement that all individuals wear facemasks in public.

"Please stay home," said Gov. Lujan Grisham. "Please, when you must go out, wear a mask, and avoid groups. Shop alone – don't bring the whole family. Over the next week, two weeks, three weeks, please be extremely conservative in deciding how much time to spend outside of the home. The visit to friends can wait – it's not worth your life, or theirs. The visit to family can wait – it's not worth your life, or theirs. Take care and take caution, and we will successfully protect our hospitals and health care workers."

"New Mexico had 819 COVID-19 cases last Friday, the largest number our state has ever seen and our hospital cases are rising again," said New Mexico Human

Services Secretary David R. Scrase, M.D. “What’s most distressing is that we’ve had record case counts in every age group. Most concerning is patients over 50-years of age account for most hospitalizations. If we want to see our case numbers and hospitalizations go down, we must all take action and pull together.”

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