Mills Administration Announces Maine to Enter Stage 4 of Reopening

October 6, 2020

Starting October 13, indoor seating limits are increased, enforcement of face coverings is strengthened statewide

The Mills Administration announced today that Maine will move into Stage 4 of the Plan to Restart Maine's Economy beginning Tuesday, October 13, 2020. With cold weather months approaching, Stage 4 increases limits on indoor seating to 50 percent capacity of permitted occupancy, or 100 people – whichever is less – and maintains the critical public health measures outlined in COVID-19 Prevention Checklists, such as enhanced cleaning practices and physical distancing. Today's Executive Order also further strengthens the State's face covering mandate by requiring that a broader set of entities, such as private schools and municipal buildings, ensure that employees and people in their buildings adhere to this critical health measure. The Order also expands the scope of the enforcement statewide, rather than in just Maine's coastal counties and more populous cities.

The progression into Stage 4 comes as Maine, adjusted for population, continues to lead the nation on key metrics for COVID-19 response, including having the lowest hospitalizations, second lowest new cases, and fourth lowest deaths.

> *"With winter weather approaching, we must support businesses across the state as outdoor service becomes less viable and people move inside. This expanded capacity, along with continued health and safety precautions, is a prudent step forward that balances public health and economic health," said Governor Janet Mills. "These adjustments, however, should not lure us into a false sense of security. This virus is still very much with us all across the state and wearing a face covering, staying six feet apart, avoiding large gatherings, and washing our hands often is key to keeping Maine schools and businesses open and keeping Maine people healthy."*

Beginning a week from today, businesses and organizations that serve people through seated activities – such as indoor dining, religious gatherings, and movie theaters – will be permitted to operate at 50 percent of their capacity, with a maximum of 100 people. Updated COVID-19 Checklists for these businesses and organizations are posted on the Department of Economic and Community Development's website. Appropriate health and safety protocols, such as enhanced cleaning practices and the requirement to maintain six feet of distance between seating areas, remain in full effect.

To arrive at this adjustment, the Administration worked closely with the Portland Regional, Lewiston-Auburn Metropolitan, and Bangor Region Chambers of Commerce, as well as the Visit Portland and Visit Bangor Regional Convention and Visitor Bureaus. The Chambers worked with their restaurant member teams to solicit feedback, of which the primary ask was to be able to operate at 50 percent capacity.

For non-seated indoor activities, such as physical activity in gyms, the limit remains at 50. The outdoor gathering limit remains at 100 people. Retailers remain subject to the occupancy limit of 5 people per 1,000 square feet of shopping space.

Stage 4 also anticipates a reopening date for indoor service for bars and tasting rooms of Monday, November 2, 2020. To reopen for indoor service, these establishments must abide by the newly-posted COVID-19 Prevention Checklist for seated food and drink service, which is an update to the restaurant checklist.

Governor Mills also expanded her Executive Order (PDF) requiring certain businesses to enforce the State's face covering requirement. During the summer months, the enforcement mandate was required only in Maine's coastal counties and more populous cities. It is now required statewide. The Governor also broadened the Order to make clear that places, such as private schools and local government buildings, must join restaurants, lodging, and retail establishments in having their employees and clients' wear face coverings. Face coverings have been proven to significantly reduce the spread of COVID-19.

> *"Led by Governor Mills, we adjust daily our balance between protecting Maine's residents from this deadly disease and increasing safe reentry into businesses, schools, and other parts of pre-COVID life," said Jeanne Lambrew, Commissioner of Health and Human Services. "Stage 4 has been made possible by focusing on science and by the hard work and common sense of Maine people."*
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> *"We recognize that winter capacity is critical to Maine businesses and want to ensure that we find alternatives that support both businesses while protecting public health," said Heather Johnson, Commissioner of Economic and Community Development. "We will continue to review creative options for other sectors as we move in to Stage 4."*
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> *"Face coverings, physical distancing, frequent handwashing, and avoiding non-essential gatherings remain the best ways for all Maine people to protect themselves and their communities," said Dr. Nirav D. Shah, Director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "Continued adherence to these science-based safety protocols, and getting your flu shots now, will help us limit potential spread of the virus during this next stage."*

Businesses that violate the Governor's Executive Orders are subject to enforcement, including possible fines and loss of licenses. To date, state officials have issued fines — in one instance nearly $20,000 — and more than two dozen imminent health hazard warnings to organizations that have not abided by the health and safety measures meant to protect their employees, customers and clients.

In April, Governor Mills issued her Plan to Restart Maine's Economy to gradually ease restrictions on some businesses and activities while also implementing protective protocols, along with broader additional health and safety measures, to protect Maine people. Since then, Maine has reopened the vast majority of its economy while maintaining one of the lowest national rates of COVID-19 transmission. Stage 4, which Maine will enter in a week, lifts some restrictions and allows all businesses and activities to resume with appropriate safety precautions.

As of October 3, 2020, Maine, adjusted for population, ranks 2nd lowest in the nation in terms of positive cases; 4th lowest in the nation in terms of deaths; the lowest in terms of patients ever-hospitalized out of the 36 states reporting; and 9th highest in the percentage of people who have recovered out of the 45 states reporting.

A copy of the Governor's Executive Order is attached (PDF).

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