



Missoula City-County Health Department

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Local Health Officials Provide a Measured Reopening Approach

Today, Missoula Health Officer Ellen Leahy issued additional local orders to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in Missoula. These measures follow Governor Bullock's announcement on Wednesday, rescinding the "Stay at Home" directive for individuals on April 26 and for some businesses on April 27.

In addition to the restrictions outlined in Phase One of the Governor's reopening plan, businesses and individuals providing grooming, beauty, body art, piercing, massage, spa, and similar services will remain closed until Phase Two. These services include but are not limited to barbers, cosmetologists, estheticians, and manicurists. Additionally, massage services must remain closed until Phase Two unless affiliated with a licensed chiropractor or physical therapy services.

Non-essential retail businesses may open only for curbside pick-up or delivery on April 27.

Essential and non-essential retail businesses, except those with later opening dates, may provide in-store business on May 1, if they can meet requirements outlined in the order. The requirements include limiting the number of customers, providing additional social distancing measures, staff health screening and ill staff exclusion. They would need to develop a plan for how they can meet the state and local directives.

Food and beverage establishments may continue to provide limited service by take-out or delivery. Dining areas may open on May 4, providing they meet the requirements in the Governor's directive, and can provide six feet between customer groups, including in booths. This also applies to bars, casinos, distilleries, and breweries.

Events and gatherings such as fairs, markets, concerts, races and sporting events, and private parties outside the home are limited to 25 people during Phase One. Events with 25 or fewer must maintain six-foot social distancing—the requirement to limit groups to 10 people when distancing cannot be maintained stands.

The local orders will remain in place until the Governor moves to Phase Two, or the health officer rescinds or modifies them.

The local orders enhance sections of the Governor's plan and provide for a more gradual reopening process. This approach will help minimize additional COVID-19 cases, protect our health care hub, our

community, and our essential businesses, services, and workers. It will also allow local public health to develop guidance for businesses during this transition.

“We know that there are cases in our County that have not been identified and are concerned that we could see a spike in cases if we loosen restrictions too quickly and without a plan. We need to take a measured approach to reopening in Missoula for the sake of the public’s health,” said Cindy Farr, Incident Commander with the Missoula City-County Health Department’s COVID-19 response.

Farr also added that the measures, while delaying some openings, will help minimize the chances of future closures or workforce impacts if cases increase. “What we don’t want is for businesses to invest in getting back on track, only to be affected again. Taking the time, providing guidance, and moving methodically is important.”

The health department recognizes that loosening any restriction is likely to contribute to case numbers but knows restrictions long-term are not practical. Working with businesses and the community to create a “new normal” in the era of the pandemic is essential.

Since Wednesday, the health department received over 200 comments from community members, business owners, and essential workers. About 90% of the comments asked for additional local measures, particularly to slow the reopening of the businesses which are covered in the order.

The department encourages community members to practice personal and community protective measures. Monitoring for symptoms, staying home when sick, washing hands, social distancing, and staying home as much as possible are still prevention measures that matter. Additionally, the Health Board’s recommendation for wearing cloth face coverings in public spaces where social distancing is hard may decrease community spread.

“Keeping cases down at this point comes down to behavior and contact tracing. We can do the contact tracing and provide guidance to our community, but we still need the community’s help. It is going to take all of us supporting each other to keep COVID-19 down. We’ve weathered this storm as well as we have because of community thinking, and that’s what’s going to continue to matter.”

If you have questions about how the local orders affect your business or organization, please call 406-258-4755.