

State uses holiday colors for health system

Written by gallupsun

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In keeping with the Christmas holiday season, the state has announced a tiered “red to green” system which is meant to help counties reopen further when they meet key health metrics.

The shift in the state’s “reopening” framework will come after a two-week “reset” period, in which state health officials enacted the most heightened level of statewide public health restrictions upon places of business and day-to-day activities in an effort to blunt the spread of COVID-19 all across New Mexico.

“The county-by-county framework enables counties, and the businesses and nonprofits within their borders, to operate with fewer restrictions when they slow the spread of the virus and drive down test positivity rates,” Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said

“It’s been a difficult year and an especially difficult past month. We must remain as vigilant as ever to contain and beat the virus; we also must look for ways to lessen the burden on our communities wherever possible, while never swerving from our top priority – protecting New Mexicans and saving lives.”

An amended emergency public health order will be executed Nov. 30, installing the new framework with an effective date of Dec. 2. The current operative requirements of the state’s two-week “reset” will be in effect through that time.

In order to prevent and mitigate the effects of the spread of the virus, and to ameliorate the unsustainable resultant strain placed upon the state’s health care system and personnel, counties where the virus is more prevalent will operate under more restrictive public health measures. Likewise, counties where the virus has been or is being suppressed will operate under less restrictive measures.

Counties will operate under one of three levels: Red, signifying very high risk; Yellow, signifying high risk; and Green, signifying medium risk.

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The New Mexico Department of Health maintains an official map displaying each county's current level on its designated COVID-19 webpage, cv.nmhealth.org. To capture an average over a period of time that accurately conveys the state of the spread of the virus in each county, the agency updates this map every other Wednesday.

When a county fails to meet the specified metrics for a given level upon the biweekly update of the map, it will begin operating at the next most restrictive level within 48 hours. When a county meets the specific metrics for a less restrictive level, it may begin operating at that level of restriction upon immediate effect of the department's biweekly update of the map.

The two key health metrics that will be used to determine where a county sits within the tiered framework, are based on the state's gating criteria, the set of public health data points tracked and measured by the state Medical Advisory Team and others: the per-capita incidence of new COVID-19 cases and average COVID-19 positive tests over a statistically meaningful period of time.

These are also the same metrics the state has used to classify counties for the purposes of gauging the risk level for limited public school re-openings and limited nursing home visitations.

As of Nov. 27, 32 of the state's 33 counties are at the Red Level. At this level, almost every category of business or nonprofit entity may operate — But with limited capacity.

The public health requirements for each level – and reminders about definitions of businesses and other entities within the state's emergency public health order follow:

No matter a county's level, the following requirements remain in place statewide:

- Facemasks are required to be worn in public.
- Businesses that accrue a significant number of positive COVID-19 cases within their workforce in a two-week span are subject to temporary closure by the Department of Health.
- An essential business may be permitted to continue operating if the Department of Health and Environment Department determine the business is a necessary provider of goods or

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services within the community in light of geographic considerations.

- Businesses that test each employee every two weeks and regularly provide contact tracing data to the Environment Department shall not be subject to closure under this framework
- This applies only to food and drink establishments; close-contact businesses; places of lodging; retail spaces; and other businesses which members of the public regularly visit.
- The closure process is triggered if four or more rapid responses occur within a 14-day period.
- Businesses and nonprofits must adhere to the state's COVID-Safe Practices.

The McKinley County map on NMDOH site shows COVID-19 averages from 11/10-20-11/23/20 with a positivity rate of 20.70 percent with eight or more average daily cases per 100,000.

