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SANTA FE - Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham announced modifications to the public health order in our state May 13.

The governor and members of her cabinet met with reporters in a virtual video conference, updating New Mexicans on numbers, modifying requirements for retailers and requiring citizens to wear masks in public.

Present at the news conference was Dr. David Scrase, the Human Services Secretary and Kathy Kunkel, Secretary for the New Mexico Department of Health.

BY THE NUMBERS

As of May 13, there are 5,364 total positive COVID-19 cases in New Mexico. In total, 200 individuals are in the hospital. Fifty-two are on ventilators.

As of the May 13 news conference, the governor said 231 people have died from COVID-19 in our state.

Starting on May 16, most retailers will be allowed to reopen at 25 percent of their fire code capacity.

Houses of worship will be able to hold congregations at 10 percent occupancy.

Other non-essential businesses can operate with up to 25 percent of their staffing levels prior to the pandemic.

However, all of these new orders do not apply to the northwestern counties of McKinley, Cibola, and San Juan.

“Retail spaces do not include entertainment venues such as movie theaters, concert halls, or amusement parks,” Lujan-Grisham said.

“ ... We’re excluding, for the time being, high-intensity contact services, so dine-in restaurants, indoor malls, salons and gyms need to be in the next phase. None of this applies to the northwestern area, because again, their risks are still too high.”

The governor said the three counties are in the “Preparation Phase” starting May 16, where non-essential retailers may provide curbside pick-up and delivery.

Additional businesses that will remain closed include tattoo parlors and casinos.

The 14-day self-quarantine order for out-of-state airport arrivals remains the same.

MASKS IN PUBLIC

Starting on May 16, New Mexicans will be required to wear face masks and/or face coverings in all public settings, indoor and outdoor.

Exceptions will include eating and drinking at restaurants when dine-in services resume, as well as outdoor exercising.

“It’s not a guarantee against the virus. While these mitigate, slow and stop the spread in many ways, it is not a guarantee that you can’t give the virus and it’s not a guarantee you can’t get the virus, because it’s not a respirator-type mask, but it really helps slow the spread and that’s why we are going to mandate it,” Lujan-Grisham said.

The masks do not have to be medical-grade and can be made from materials at home.

INCREASED TESTING

The New Mexico Department of Health is increasing its presence at border towns to help combat the virus.

“You will see an increased presence of the department of health and our partners providing testing in these communities,” Kunkel said.

An exact number of increased testing sites was not immediately made available.

GALLUP AREA

After the City of Gallup went on lockdown earlier in May, the governor stressed the importance of businesses limiting hours and restricting how many people should travel in cars.

“I do think the measures McKinley County took in particular, not only saved lives and bent the curve in Gallup, and in particular in the county, but saved lives in the Navajo Nation, and prevented spread in many of those chapters by closing off the community, while at the same time, being very strong advocates that the state had to take responsibility to the highest degree possible” Lujan-Grisham said to the *Gallup Sun*.

As of May 13, McKinley County has 1,681 cases of COVID-19, the most of any county in New Mexico.

FINDING A VACCINE

The governor said Los Alamos National Labs is working on a vaccine.

“There are a variety of vehicles and research applications occurring in LANL, and we’ve got some private labs that I know are engaged in consulting that have incredible experience with viruses,” Lujan-Grisham said.

“The LANL team is heavily tracking the genetics and the RNA of the virus as it evolves, which you have to do to develop a vaccine to make sure you cover the various expressions of that virus at different places and different times, similar to what we do with influenza,” Scrase said.

Scrase said the team at LANL helped develop an HIV-t-cell vaccine.

Scrase said a COVID-19 vaccine for mass production will take time to develop, noting it could be 15 to 18 months.

“If you’re coming up with a vaccine you’re going to use to vaccinate the entire world, you have to be extremely careful to note and [flush] out any potential side effects, adverse reactions, you have to know it works,” he said.

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