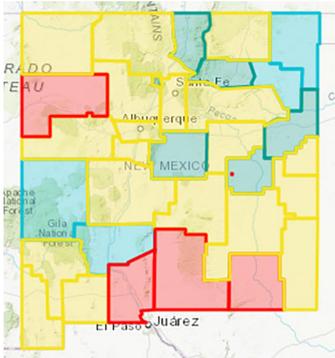


## Introducing the Turquoise Level

Written by Staff Reports  
Friday, 05 March 2021 06:08

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### NEW COLOR WILL OFFER LOWER RESTRICTIONS TO COVID DASHBOARD

**SANTA FE** — The state of New Mexico’s Red-Yellow-Green framework for aligning county-level requirements and guidelines with local virus risk has been modified to permit more day-to-day and commercial activities, reflecting the improving COVID-19 outlook across the state as New Mexicans help drive down transmission and vaccine distribution contributes to decreased community spread.

The framework includes a new least restrictive level where all categories of business can operate indoors with minimal occupancy limitations, depending on the risk level of the activity. A county will reach this least restrictive level, the Turquoise Level, by meeting key health criteria for two consecutive two-week periods and effectively graduating out of the Red-Yellow-Green framework, provided the virus remains suppressed.

“I know New Mexicans are tired of COVID-19 – I am too,” Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said. “We have made very solid progress in recent weeks and months, and we have all together saved lives and protected our family members and neighbors. We have to keep it up.”

“We can introduce a little more risk, based on our progress, and start to feel a little bit closer to normal — but only if we keep making those safe choices to protect our families and one another. I know New Mexicans are up to the task,” she said.

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The framework assigns a risk level — and corresponding color — to New Mexico counties based on key health metrics over a two-week timeframe. The health metrics— a test positivity rate below 5 percent and a new per-capita case rate of fewer than 8 per 100,000 — measure the incidence and spread of COVID-19 in a given community. A county that meets one of the criteria may operate at the Yellow Level; a county that meets both may operate at the Green Level; counties that meet neither of the criteria must operate at the Red Level.

The framework has helped limit large congregations of people that would have slowed the state’s gradual progress in controlling COVID-19. It is designed to match a local area’s decreasing risk level with loosened requirements, and vice versa, and to balance the need to contain the virus with the need for standard localized “openness” amid this stage of the pandemic.

The county-by-county framework will include a new least-restrictive designation signifying low risk: the Turquoise Level, as of Feb. 24. A county may operate at the Turquoise Level after having met both key health metrics for four weeks. In other words, a county that meets the criteria to operate at the Green Level for two consecutive biweekly map updates will elevate to the Turquoise Level, which includes significantly fewer restrictions on commercial and day-to-day activities.

The Turquoise Level includes provisions for expanded indoor dining, the operation of entertainment venues like theaters, bars and clubs and more.

The updated risk framework and public health order also includes the following changes:

Businesses that had previously been categorized as “close-contact recreational facilities,” and closed at each level of the risk system, will be re-categorized and permitted to operate at limited capacities depending on their new category and the risk level of the county in which they operate.

State parks, which had previously been open only for day-use for New Mexico residents, will now be open to camping with reservations and day-use for all.

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### ***LARGE ENTERTAINMENT VENUES, RECREATIONAL FACILITIES, BARS***

Previously the state public health order had categorized certain businesses requiring longer periods of close contact among patrons as “close-contact recreational facilities,” which were closed at all risk levels.

Those businesses will be re-categorized and permitted to operate in a manner that corresponds to the risk level of the county in which they operate, as outlined in the updated public health order:

“Large entertainment venues” are defined as any publicly or privately owned venue typically or actually used to host large audiences for the purposes of entertainment or amusement, including but not limited to racetracks, concert venues, movie theaters, performance venues, professional sports venues and theaters.

At the Turquoise Level, these venues may operate at up to 33 percent of maximum occupancy of any enclosed space on the premises, as determined by the relevant fire marshal or department, and up to 75 percent of maximum occupancy of any outdoor space on the premises.

At the Green Level, these venues may operate at up to 25 percent of maximum occupancy of any enclosed space on the premises, as determined by the relevant fire marshal or department, and up to 50 percent of maximum occupancy of any outdoor space on the premises.

At the Yellow Level, these venues may operate at up to 25 percent of any outdoor space on the premises but may not permit patrons to enter the indoor portions of the venue except for the limited purpose of using a restroom; employees may occupy the indoor portion of the facility to the extent necessary to operate the outdoor portion.

At the Red Level, these venues may not operate.

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***To review the new public health order and the regulations for each of the four color levels for COVID-19 reopening, go to: <https://cv.nmhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/022421-PHO.pdf>***