

This Saturday we enter Phase 1 of the reopening of the New Mexico economy

May 14, 2020: Message from Council Chair Sara Scott:

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As we enter a new phase of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, I hope this note finds you, your families and friends well. The County Council and Manager have very much appreciated all of the ideas coming from community members regarding how to take care of our most vulnerable citizens, how to support businesses adjusting to new operational requirements, and how we should consider potential future openings of facilities and programs in our community. As we reflect on the anniversary of the Cerro Grande fire while the risk from the virus remains high, we continue to show our spirit and how we work together to overcome real challenges.

Starting May 1, in accordance with guidance from the state, we entered the Preparation Phase of reopening the New Mexico economy. The Stay at Home guidance remains in place, but some additional limited business openings have occurred including non-essential retail using curbside pickup and delivery, non-emergency dental services, golf course operation (without pro-shop sales), and veterinary and pet grooming services. The Los Alamos Medical Center started performing limited elective surgeries on May 11 per state guidelines.

Because of the progress in meeting the statewide public health gating criteria, including a COVID-19 transmission rate of 1.15, most of the state will enter Phase I on May 16. (The transmission rate on May 12 was 1.16 – down from 1.24 the previous week.) Phase I will further open businesses, for example: retailers at 25% of fire code capacity, office spaces at 25% of pre-crisis staffing levels, modified and limited youth summer and sports programs, and houses of worship at 10% capacity. However, the stay at home order continues and telework should continue wherever possible. Additionally, a Public Health Order mandating face-coverings in most public settings will be effective Saturday May 16.

Phases II and III are contemplated for later in the summer, again pending our ability to continue to meet the stated gating criteria.

In all cases compliance with COVID-Safe Practices, is required. COVID-Safe Practices have been developed for all New Mexicans, employers, and retailers and the Governor's Economic Recovery Council is in the process of developing industry-specific COVID-Safe Practices. These are expected to be available by May 19. (For a summary of the gating criteria, phased reopening approach, and the currently available COVID-Safe Practices, please see losalamosnm.us (COVID-19 updates button, Los Alamos Reopen Plan dropdown, Plan Preview) and cv.nmhealth.org/newsroom (press conference slides box)).

During the upcoming May 19 County Council Work Session we will be discussing the path forward for County operations in the context of the statewide approach. These discussions will include which County workers may continue to work remotely, events that we anticipate cancelling, and the types of facilities and programs we may consider opening as we proceed through the statewide phased reopening of the economy. These have also been topics of discussion by the Mayor's Council (that I participate in with approximately 20 mayors from around the state to provide input and feedback to the Governor's office); we will continue to inform and learn from others as we all develop a path forward. My understanding is that as Los Alamos National Laboratory works to plan their future activities, they anticipate a significant number of workers continuing to telework and a phased and potentially staggered approach to resuming additional operations.

Testing and contact tracing capabilities are important components of supporting reopening and the most recent information I have is that New Mexico performed about 4,500 tests on May 12 and is on a trajectory to meet the goal of 5,000 tests per day. Additionally, anyone that wants a COVID-19 test can now get one; please contact the Los Alamos Public Health Office (call 662-4038 for an appointment). Daily updates regarding the spread of the virus are provided by the New Mexico Department of Health (please see cv.nmhealth.org), 440 tests have been performed for Los Alamos County as of May 13. Additionally, the Laboratory has started testing employees and this not only supports their operations but will increase the number of County residents who have been tested. As I've noted previously, for those tested outside of the County, a positive result may not immediately be reflected in the County's statistics.

It is essential during the coming months, both for the health and well-being of our community and the safe and expanded operation of our businesses, that we all continue to avoid unnecessary travel, wash our hands frequently, avoid gatherings, and wear a multilayer face covering while maintaining a 6 foot distance from others when in public. Following these guidelines is important, since asymptomatic individuals are responsible for 44% of transmitted infections (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0869-5>). If 80% of us wear face masks, we can decrease the peak daily death rate by about 35-60% (Infectious Disease Modeling, Volume 5, 2020, p. 293-308). The Los Alamos Commerce and Development Corporation (LACDC) continues to provide important support to our businesses as they expand operations. In addition to helping identify vendors with needed protective equipment and cleaning supply stock the LACDC is now in the process of securing masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer that can be distributed at no cost to local businesses, if needed.

I look forward to us continuing to work together as a community to do what we can to help each other. As an example, a new online tool implemented by the Department of Public Utilities has resulted in almost \$3,500 in donations to the Utilities Assistance Program over the last couple of weeks. These and so many other examples of generosity I see and hear about every day show that we can and will continue to make a difference in minimizing the impact of the virus to our community.