
June 26, 2020

Cowley County expands numbers for gatherings:

On May 29, 2020 Public Health protective measures were issued in Cowley County that allowed the re-opening of activities in Cowley County in an incremental fashion as we continue to observe, learn and respond to public health matters connected with the SARS-CoV2 virus; (COVID-19).

During the weeks that have passed since that date we have been continually dealing with an ongoing COVID-19 outbreak within our local population. The outbreak began only days after the new guidelines became effective and has increased our confirmed illness cases more than tenfold. During the peak of this outbreak we detected and confirmed as many as six new cases each day.

During this time span we also responded to several community incidents of great concern that were behavioral based. People who were tested due to illness symptoms failed to remain isolated and their behavior exposed numerous others to potential illness. Other people that were in fact ill with the virus ignored quarantine orders and engaged in social activities such as visiting casinos and going to garage sales and performing local shopping, again exposing others to illness. Other individuals that were exposed during social activities took the virus home to family members resulting in entire households becoming ill. Sadly, we have seen how the spread of COVID-19 is threatening our long-term care facilities where our most vulnerable people reside. We are also seeing more individuals over the age of 60 becoming ill. All this news is troubling and if this were the only data to be examined would likely lead to continued restrictions on social activities.

In all situations there are other matters to consider and review. When the Coronavirus Pandemic was declared nationally in March of 2020 we were concerned about several things. No immunity, no antivirals or vaccines, high infection rates, rapid spread of the virus, high mortality rates and the severe health consequences that would overburden the health care system and lead to greater numbers of associated deaths. In the months that followed we were focused upon detection of the virus.

The recent outbreak and continuing illness spread has allowed us to witness the severity of COVID-19 on individuals. Some people who are infected are ill for weeks, some for only days. In some cases, symptoms are quite severe and in other cases hardly noticeable. The virus does spread easily and rapidly in some situations and in others one person becomes ill and no one else in the family does. The most encouraging data to come out of what has occurred is that the recovery rate in our community has been extremely good, (only one death related to the virus). Additionally, our ability to test for the virus is greater now than it has ever been before. Finally, our health care system in the local area is not being overwhelmed and is able to care for any individual that needs care. Hopefully we can sustain this trend.

Over that last week we have seen more people who were ill recover than new cases emerge. We can see that taking personal health precautions as advised is serving to protect human health. The simple things, avoiding large crowds and areas where close social contact can occur, wearing a mask to protect yourself and others, practicing good personal hygiene and handwashing, and staying home when you are ill or required to because of testing all result in positive health outcomes. Continuing these practices throughout the coming months will greatly reduce the severity of ALL illness in the community.

The summer has officially begun, and the celebration of our national freedom is just ahead. Outdoor activities by their basic design help to separate people. It is understood that people will soon be gathering for events like fireworks displays and concerts in the park. As these are outdoor events with plenty of space provided for social distancing there is no reason to not responsibly enjoy these events. Indoor events are still a concern and the numbers of people in a confined setting should be limited to less than a buildings normally stated capacity. Above all people should decide the level of risk that they are comfortable in accepting and no attend any event that causes them personal anxiety or fear of contracting any illness. People who do engage in activities should be mindful that not everyone has the same risk tolerance and should give others respect and maintain social distance. Being compassionate and considerate of others will help us all get through this pandemic and on to better days once again.

In order to enjoy the pending summer outdoor activities the local public health order which adopted the Ad Astra Framework as guidance and allows for amendment of that plan is changing.

Effective Monday June 29, 2020, the numbers for the following activities outlined in the framework are amended as follows:

Mass Gatherings (outdoor events, i.e. concerts, park gatherings, open markets, etc.) to 750 persons maximum to be determined by available open space for the activity with social distancing required.

Social Gatherings (indoors where appropriate space is available) to 300 persons maximum or 25% of rated occupancy rate of the building so long as adequate social distancing can occur.

On-Site Operations (indoors) to 150 persons maximum for meetings of short duration with social distancing and other health precautions utilized.

All other conditions and guidelines within the Ad Astra plan for Phase 3 should be followed including social distancing, personal health protections and travel restrictions when traveling outside Cowley County.

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The expansion of activities in Cowley County will continue to be monitored closely. The Health Department will continue to react if illness erupts. It is extremely important that everyone understands that we are not risk free nor will we be for the foreseeable future. That while we are moving to greater amounts of activity it will be important that everyone remain vigilant and take all the precautions to protect themselves against catching disease.

Please distance yourselves appropriately, engage in proper hygiene, wash your hands, cover your coughs and sneezes, wear a protective mask if you can safely do so, especially in larger groups. If you are physically compromised or otherwise at risk do not engaged in increased activities. Most importantly **IF YOU ARE ILL OR HAVE SYPTOMS OF ILLNESS STAY HOME!!!** Contact your health care provider or the Health Department and be tested.

If all goes well and we maintain this level of activity for a minimum of three weeks, and if our health indicators remain at current levels, we will look to move into Phase 4 (aka Phase out) on or about July 20, 2020.

This plan has been shared the local community leadership, Emergency Management and the local chambers of Commerce and Cowley First.

Please enjoy the outdoors and the fun that can be had in our county but please be safe.

As always,

Stay Well.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Thomas Langer".

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