
May 29, 2020

Cowley County to move to Phase 3 of Re-opening:

To the Citizens of Cowley County:

On May 27, 2020 a Public Health Order was issued in Cowley County to fill the void created by the Governor's veto of HB 2054. The local order was framed to allow Cowley County the opportunity to observe what may occur in the political arena with the pending special legislative session, before enacting any great changes to reopening plans and activities already underway in our communities.

Moving cautiously is the best way to protect our citizens who may be adversely affected by social activity with visitors to the county, especially from areas in our region where person to person spread of the virus is still ongoing. If those areas had remained closed and Cowley County were to open quickly, we would have greatly increased the likelihood of illness by inviting the virus into our midst. That concern lessened somewhat when Sedgwick County moved to immediately reopen all levels of social and economic activities in their county against the advice of their own Health Department and local public health officer.

The public health conditions in Cowley County, including testing rates, infection rate, hospital capacity, active cases and COVID-19 fatality rate remain positive. Even with the optimistic indicators we will be cautious. Today we have confirmed a fifth (5th) case of COVID-19 in Cowley County. I am hopeful that this will be an isolated case and will not lead to more cases, but human interactions are complex and as such we will take all the necessary steps to prevent further spread of the virus. Disease investigation and contact tracing activities and quarantining of individuals is currently underway.

Despite today's new case of COVID-19, we are at a point in time where the Cowley County community is ready to re-engage and expand social and economic activity.

The local public health order issued on Wednesday which adopted the Ad Astra Framework as guidance allows for amendment of that plan. With due consideration given to the public health factors that we are constantly monitoring and the needs of our communities we are loosening the current Phase 2 restrictions in the following fashion:

Cowley County will move into Phase 3 reopening on Monday, June 1, 2020

We amend the numbers for the following activities outlined in the framework as follows:

Mass Gatherings (outdoor events) to 250 persons maximum.

Social Gatherings (indoors where appropriate space is available) to 150 persons maximum.

On-Site Operations (indoors) to 100 persons maximum.

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.

New signage for businesses and public spaces will be available to the communities in the coming days. The signage will serve to remind everyone to be mindful of how to prevent the spread of illness. The signs will be consistent and uniform alerting patrons to stay home if feeling ill. These will be distributed through our chambers of commerce and hopefully the city offices.

Moving to Phase 3 would allow for several activities to resume in the County:

- Churches can reopen and in person services can resume;
- Funeral services can be held;
- Weddings and special gathering events can be held;
- Local graduations can occur (within the stated limits)
- Businesses such as bars and other event venues can open;
- Summer Camps can be held;
- Swimming Pools may open;
- Outdoor athletics may begin;
- Local park events music, movies etc.

All the above-named events should follow the previously stated maximum number guidance.

If there are activities not listed above the individuals, employers, business or entity should contact the Public Health Officer for a determination prior to engaging in the activity. We anticipate many questions will be asked and that people continue to seek advice and guidance about what is allowed and what is safe in Phase 3.

The expansion of activities in Cowley County will be monitored closely. The Health Department will react if illness erupts and is traced to this expanded social activity. 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 against catching disease.

You must still distance appropriately, you must engage in proper hygiene, wash your hands, cover coughs and sneezes, wear protective masks if you can safely do so especially in larger groups. If you are physically compromised or 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.

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If all goes well and we maintain this level of activity for a minimum of two weeks, and if our health indicators remain at current levels, we will look to move into Phase 4 (aka Phase out) on or about June 15, 2020.

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

Finally, please understand that we need to engage once again. Our behaviors will provide us the data that is needed for us to be able to plan for the coming weeks and months ahead. It will provide us feedback in order to prepare for the new school year. It will likely even impact events that are most cherished in Cowley County. How we do as a community may well affect Independence Day celebrations, the County Fair, the Walnut Valley Festival and Arkalalah.

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 that reads "Thomas Langer".

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