**Webster County Response and Recovery Best Practices Guide**

**April 2020**

Although we are currently and squarely in Phase 1 of our region’s COVID-19 response, we should be constantly looking to take steps to emerge from the crisis and resume normal life---while preventing steps backward in the fight against COVID-19. As a county, the response of not only our jurisdiction, but that of the region, will determine the course of the disease. As such, this planning document will address both Webster County and the response occurring in collaboration with other public health agencies in our region. It will focus on the current state of our county as well as look forward to providing guidance and framework on how we move into Phase 2 - Recovery. Consequential decisions around reopening have the potential to be immensely beneficial but also carry the possibility for unintentional harm. Every time we venture out in public, there is an increased risk for exposure with the disease that needs to be considered in our planning. Reopening Webster County should be done in phases separated by 2 to 3 weeks as the decisions to reopen will take that long to be reflected in the numbers of new COVID-19 daily case counts, hospitalizations, and deaths, along with other surveillance tools.

On April 27, 2020, Dr. Randall Williams, Director of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services issued a statewide order (attached) directing how the state should safely enter into its recovery phase from the COVID-19 pandemic. This order will remain in effect from May 04 through May 31, unless extended during that time.

Taking into consideration the uniqueness of Webster County and its residents, the Webster County Health Unit has developed the following recommendations for the gradual reopening of Webster County, Missouri. These guidelines rely heavily on the business community and community members at large to continue to practice prudent health and safety measures at home, at work, at worship, and when in the community.

## Phase 1: Slow the Spread

Although at a continually slowing rate, over the past several weeks, case counts have continued to climb in Missouri and Webster County. Current case counts can be found at <https://health.mo.gov>. There is immense pressure to get back to business as usual, and this document should help direct Webster County to move in that direction. Phase 1 consists of community-wide social distancing measures to slow the spread by recommending that county residents stay at home. The risk of increased transmission of COVID-19 are balanced against risks to the health and well-being of the public, society, and the economy from measures taken to reduce the spread of the disease.

## Triggers for Moving to Phase 2 - Recovery

As the county has responded to COVID-19, we need to focus on embracing changes that have created improvements and efficiencies. As the county prepares to reopen, it must have confidence that it is prepared to do so. Following this response plan, the county should not proceed into the Recovery Phase until the following five elements are achieved:

1. Sustained reduction in positive cases for at least 14 days
2. Hospitals are able to treat all patients with COVID-19 without crisis standards of care – including monitoring available beds and COVID cases in the hospitals
3. All symptomatic people can be tested – through the collaborative efforts between OCH Wellpointe, Jordan Valley Health Center, CoxHealth, and Mercy to organize drive-thru clinics in Webster County.
4. Public health can maintain active case and contact isolation and monitoring including the number of residents in quarantine
5. Procuring and sustaining a supply of PPE

**Sustained reduction in cases for at least 14 days**

As the county has passed the first month of disease, data is becoming available to inform our understanding of the spread and progress of the disease. Through the first month of our county’s response, there was cautious optimism that we were able to avoid the explosive growth of the disease that other counties experienced. At the end of March, Webster County had their first positive case of COVID-19. Within three weeks, the number of positive COVID-19 cases reached 13. As part of the surveillance and case investigation process, Webster County Health Unit epidemiological team will continue to closely monitor and report relevant metrics on the progress on an ongoing basis.

**Hospitals are able to treat all patients with COVID-19 without crisis standard of care**

If there is an extreme growth of total and active cases within the county, there will be increasing pressure on the healthcare system. This is a primary concern and focus on the county’s response to COVID-19. Exceeding this capacity has a detrimental effect on the county. Currently, hospitals have been able to treat all patients with COVID-19. Webster County Health Unit will determine bed capacity as well as total number of COVID patients hospitalized and when threshold limits are reached by contacting the hospitals in Springfield and Lebanon, MO as well as monitoring the SEMA Situation Report found at <https://sema.dps.mo.gov/newspubs/docs/dailybriefs.pdf>, CDC and Department of Health and Senior Services websites.

**All symptomatic people can be tested**

Testing has significantly improved since the start of the outbreak. During the first few weeks, testing was extremely limited and the turnaround time for results was exceedingly long (with some test results taking greater than two weeks). More recently, testing capacity has significantly increased and the turnaround time for results has significantly decreased. Using a combination of government and private laboratories, test results are provided between 1 and 3 days. Currently, there is sufficient testing available to meet the needs for all symptomatic people to be tested. As the county is reopened, there will likely be more testing and quicker test results. Webster County Health Unit will work with regional partners including the Springfield/Greene County Health Department, CoxHealth, Mercy, OCH Wellpointe, and Jordan Valley Health Center to meet this need, as tests become available that produce results in less than 24 hours.

**Public health can maintain active case and contact isolation and monitoring**

Currently, public health can maintain active case and contact isolation and monitoring. As was previously discussed, Webster County Health Unit has taken steps to dramatically increase the capacity to conduct epidemiology activities in response to COVID-19. For the foreseeable future, case investigation, isolation, and quarantine can be maintained.

**Procuring and sustaining a supply of PPE**

Based on input from healthcare providers and first responders in the county, Webster County Health Unit will monitor and help to ensure an adequate supply and the ongoing source of replenishment of personal protective equipment (PPE).

**Regional Considerations**

As Webster County moves towards reopening the county, the spread of and response to COVID-19 throughout the region must be taken into consideration. There are differing capacities and capabilities throughout the region to effectively respond to the testing, public health, healthcare, and county needs to combat COVID-19. As such, community leaders and policy makers will need to review information beyond Webster County. Data on the spread of disease and other key measures will also be presented regularly to community partners.

## Phase 2: Recovery

During Phase 2, the county will take steps to reopen and recover, while still implementing multiple measures to check the spread of disease. When reopening the county, it is vital that it occurs with ultimate regard for maintaining life and reducing morbidity while balancing the vital need to restart the economy. If a county is reopened too aggressively, the virus can spread quickly, overwhelming the healthcare and public health systems, nullifying much of the work and county sacrifice that has been made. If reopened too slowly and conservatively, it will become increasingly more challenging for the economy to recover, making the long-term impact of the virus even more devastating. It is also important that individual communities/counties in our region take these steps in a coordinated manner, adjusting as needed.

Throughout the duration of Recovery, vigilant surveillance of available data is required. Using data to drive decision-making in reopening the county will allow for a balanced, responsive approach.

Within implementation of the Recovery Phase there are three key elements:

1. Adjust social distancing strategies and encourage the public to wear face masks
2. Maintain focus on testing, isolation strategies and healthcare
3. Identifying individual and corporate responsibility

## Adjust Social distancing Strategies

Prior to the current statewide stay-at-home order, there were multiple phased-in actions taken by Webster County to increase social distancing. A similar, stepwise approach is recommended as counties are reopened. The following outlines several recommendations in this continuum. Movement through each step will be determined by the spread or containment of the disease. Each step within Recovery should be a minimum of two weeks (14 days) and may be as long as several months. If the spread of COVID-19 increases to unacceptable levels, the recommendation is to move backwards through the steps up to and including resuming a stay-at-home order.

Throughout the steps, social distancing standards should be applied, which includes remaining physically separated by 6 feet at all times and frequent disinfecting of surfaces of common areas and in between groups’ use of a space. There is emerging evidence that asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission of COVID-19 is possible, which complicates efforts to pursue case-based interventions. To reduce this risk, everyone, including those without symptoms, should be encouraged to wear nonmedical fabric face masks while in public. Face masks will be most effective at slowing the spread if they are widely used because they may help prevent people who are asymptomatically infected from transmitting the disease unknowingly. During Recovery, travel outside of the county and region should only occur for essential activities and is otherwise discouraged. For those who do travel internationally or within the United States, a 14-day isolation is recommended upon return to the county.

**Step 1: Reopen businesses and organizations with occupancy limitations, no mass gatherings**

Step 1 begins to relax the county mitigation strategies to cautiously resume some normal county activities while keeping many measures in place to limit physical interactions and the spread of disease. Business owners and organizational leaders are encouraged to allow/encourage their employees, volunteers, customers, and members to practice social distancing, hand hygiene, routine temperature checking upon entry of the facility, and use of face masks wherever possible. Individuals at high risk (those 60 and over, have a chronic illness and/or are immunocompromised) should continue to stay at home and not interact with others except for activities deemed vital to their wellbeing.

Business/Organization: Current essential, non-retail businesses and organizations will continue operations. Most businesses and organizations that were non-essential (hair/nail salons, dog groomers, fitness gyms, restaurants, tattoo parlors, libraries, movie theaters, campsites, etc.), as well as all retail, may be reopened, and are required to adhere to the above referenced order from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, including occupancy and social distancing. All businesses should continue to apply social distancing strategies in all facilities. When possible, operations should be conducted remotely. Business activities that bring people together are discouraged as it increases risk to spread disease. Specific guidance is available for the various business types. Please refer to industry specific guidance attached.

Mass gatherings: Mass gatherings are discouraged. A mass gathering is any gathering of 10 or more individuals in a location where physical interaction is possible, whether spontaneous or scheduled.

All vulnerable individuals (those 60 and older, have a chronic illness and/or are immunocompromised) should continue to shelter in place. Members of households with vulnerable residents should be aware that by returning to work or other environments where distancing is not practical, they could carry the virus back home. Precautions should be taken to isolate from vulnerable residents.

Visiting nursing homes, long-term care facilities, retirement homes, or assisted living homes are prohibited by Missouri’s Statewide Order 20-29, unless to provide critical assistance or in end-of-life circumstances.

Minimize non-essential travel and adhere to CDC guidelines regarding isolation following travel. If travel is required internationally or within the United States, a 14-day isolation is recommended for anyone upon returning to the county.

**Step 2: Reduce limitations for businesses and organizations, reintroduce limited mass gatherings**

Step 2 continues the reopening of counties by relaxing the occupancy limitations and begins to resume mass gatherings on a limited basis. Maintaining social distancing strategies are recommended for all interactions within the county. High risk individuals should continue to limit interactions to those that are considered vital.

Business/Organizations: Current essential, non-retail, businesses and organizations will continue operations. All businesses and organizations should continue to apply social distancing standards in all facilities. When possible, operations should be conducted remotely.

Mass gatherings: Mass gatherings may resume. All mass gatherings should apply social distancing standards, and if social distancing standards cannot be met, the gathering should be postponed or cancelled.

All vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place. Members of households with vulnerable residents should be aware that by returning to work or other environments where distancing is not practical, they could carry the virus back home. Precautions should be taken to isolate from vulnerable residents.

Visiting nursing homes, long-term care facilities, retirement homes, or assisted living homes are prohibited by Missouri’s Statewide Order 20-29, unless to provide critical assistance or in end-of-life circumstances.

Minimize travel to essential travel only and adhere to CDC Guidelines regarding isolation following travel. If travel is required internationally or within the United States, a 14-day isolation may be recommended upon return to the county.

**Step 3: Remove limitations for business, maintain limited mass gatherings, reopen schools**

Step 3 allows for further reopening of the county, while still limiting mass gatherings, which are a risk for rapid county spread of the virus. Interactions throughout the county should continue to maintain social distancing strategies. With the increase in physical interactions, individuals and organizations should increase the focus on personal protection through hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and self-isolation with symptom onset. High risk individuals should continue to limit interactions to those that are considered vital.

Business: Businesses should continue to apply social distancing strategies in all facilities. All occupancy restrictions for businesses may be removed. When possible, business operations should be conducted remotely.

Mass gatherings: Mass gatherings and the recommendations in Step 2 remain the same. All vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place. Members of households with vulnerable residents should be aware that by returning to work or other environments where distancing is not practical, they could carry the virus back home. Precautions should be taken to isolate from vulnerable residents.

Visiting nursing homes, long-term care facilities, retirement homes, or assisted living homes are prohibited by Missouri’s Statewide Order 20-29, unless to provide critical assistance or in end-of-life circumstances.

Schools: All schools should wait to reopen until the county is squarely in Phase 3. Social distancing and personal protection strategies should be applied to full capability. Protocols should be implemented regarding regular hand hygiene of students, teachers and staff as well as routine cleaning procedures. The Department of Secondary Education (DESE) will direct the schools on reopening specifics.

Continue to minimize travel to essential travel only and adhere to CDC Guidelines regarding isolation following travel. If travel is required internationally or within the United States, a 14-day isolation may be recommended upon return to the county.

**Step 4: Expand mass gatherings**

Step 4 takes a final step in reopening the county with restrictions. Step 4 should be maintained until a transition to Phase 3 is achieved. High risk individuals should continue to limit interactions to those that are considered vital.

Business/Organization: Businesses should continue to apply social distancing strategies in all facilities. All occupancy restrictions for businesses may be removed. When possible, business operations should be conducted remotely.

Mass gatherings: All mass gatherings should apply social distancing standards, and if social distancing standards cannot be met, the gathering should be postponed or cancelled.

Schools: All schools may be reopened. Social distancing and personal protection strategies should be applied to full capability and as directed by DESE.

Travel may resume but individuals should be aware if traveling internationally or within the United States a 14-day isolation may be recommended upon return to the county.

**Maintain Focus on Testing, Isolation Strategies and Healthcare**

As the county engages in Step 1 – Step 4 of Recovery to reopen the county, there is an ongoing need to maintain focus on the following:

1. Testing is available to everyone based on CDC and Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS)
2. Individuals with COVID-19 and their contacts are isolated as directed by CDC and DHSS
3. The healthcare system has adequate capacity to treat COVID-19 individuals needing care

Testing supplies and laboratory services must be able to maintain turnaround time of testing of less than 72 hours, with a goal of less than 24-hour turnaround. This will provide public health and healthcare information needed to respond to the disease and provide county leaders with accurate and timely information for decision making.

Public health must maintain the increased capacity to conduct epidemiological processes. As efficiency and effectiveness permits, public health and healthcare should implement initiatives to provide targeted and rapid testing and containment strategies with newly identified cases. These approaches may prove beneficial to limit the spread of disease.

During Recovery, healthcare will continue to treat the symptoms and secondary effects of the disease. Therapeutic modalities will be introduced as they become available. Significant progress in treatment may also encourage the reopening of the county.

**Individual and Corporate**

During the implementation of reopening the county in Phase 2, individual and corporate responsibility is the most important component, and the most challenging to ensure. The major assumption throughout Recovery is that the success and continued reopening depends on large-scale compliance with the guidance that has been issued. While community/county leaders are responsible for determining the timing and implementation of reopening, the full adoption of the spirit behind the steps is incumbent of everyone.

Businesses, associations, churches, and organizations must take responsibility for taking appropriate measures for their employees, members, and patrons. Applying social distancing strategies including the limitations of occupancy, maintaining social distancing of 6 feet, providing remote accessibility, and not allowing anyone with symptoms to be present will greatly affect the county’s wellbeing.

It is each of our own individual decisions and actions that will ultimately determine the spread of COVID-19. Diseases are fueled by sick people in contact with healthy people and insufficient hygienic practices. We also know that people can spread disease up to 48 hours before becoming symptomatic. Choosing to abide by the recommendations at each step of the county reopening will allow the county to more quickly emerge from the impacts of COVID-19. When we focus on the county’s response and recovery, not just ourselves, we all benefit.

## Adjusting the Response and Trigger for Phase 3

How quickly and effectively the county can reopen is directly related to the spread of COVID-19, which depends on the county’s response. When all recommendations and guidance in each step are followed, the likelihood for a more rapid reopening occurs. When rules or guidance are not followed, the reopening process is likely to take significantly longer. The progression of COVID-19 will be monitored by public health officials and county leaders. When the spread of disease is slow or reduced, progression into and through Recovery will occur. If the spread of disease is rapid or hits elevated levels that exceed hospital capacity, it is likely that the county will have to regress with reopening the county and may include an additional stay-at-home order.

When the county has sustained a low level of COVID-19, allowing it to progress through the steps of Recovery, there are three triggers that could prompt movement into Phase 3:

1. Availability of a vaccine
2. Widespread availability of effective treatment
3. Minimal active cases

Phase 3 will introduce long-term solutions to mitigate the spread of disease and lift all restrictions associated with COVID-19. More detailed plans for transitioning into Phase 3 will be developed as the time nears.