

Nebraska State and Legislative Actions:

Governor Update

Gov. Ricketts announced at his Friday press briefing several updates on directed health measures:

Statewide Changes

- DHM is being extended for Douglas County Health Department, as well as Sarpy and Cass County Department of Health and Wellness to May 3
- The statewide closure until April 30 of all beauty/nail salons, barber shops, massage therapy services, gentleman's clubs, bottle clubs, indoor movie theatres, indoor theatres, and tattoo parlors/studios is extended to May 3rd.
 - Some areas will have DHMs past May 3rd
- Moving to 19 Separate DHMs
 - One for each Local Health Department starting May 4th
 - New May 4th DHMs will be effective through May 31st
- Churches
 - Will have relaxed DHM requirements statewide beginning May 4th
 - Will expand to 6-foot separation rule
 - Churches will need to ensure six feet of separation between different households
 - No passing of any items amongst congregants
 - Expanded guidance document will be provided with DHM

Regional Changes

- Updates will affect the following Local Health Departments:
 - Douglas County
 - Sarpy/Cass County
 - East Central
 - Four Corners
 - Loup Basin
 - North Central
 - Northeast Nebraska
 - Panhandle Public Health
 - Southeast District
 - Southwest Nebraska
- 10-person rule
 - Beauty/nail salons, barber shops, massage therapy services, tattoo parlors/studios added to list of businesses that fall under the 10-person rule can open May 4
 - Workers and patrons will be required to wear masks
 - For other districts not listed, the restrictions on these industries remain in place
- Restaurants
 - Will be allowed dine-in options if all the following conditions are met
 - Limited to 50% of rated occupancy maximum at a time
 - 6 feet separation between seating of different parties

- Maximum of 6 individuals in a dining party (groups larger than 6 will need to split into multiple tables)
 - Self-serve buffets and salad bars are prohibited
 - Bar seating not permitted
 - Patrons may only consume alcohol on premise if also consuming a meal
- Bars that do not serve food will remain limited to carry-out sales and delivery only
- Other closures
 - Bars, Gentleman’s Clubs, Bottle Clubs, Indoor Movie Theatres, Indoor Theatres will remain closed until May 31st but subject to change before that date
- Daycare facilities
 - Will expand to not more than 15 kids per room/space
 - All other state provisions, statutes, regulations, including child to staff ratio, still apply

Ricketts also announced that he wants to get 1,000 employees from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to help local public health districts with contact tracing—which is the process of finding people exposed to an infected person.

DHHS

Dannette Smith, CEO of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, spoke more on contact tracing. Smith said contact tracing is proactive, as it leads to assessments as to whether other people should isolate or quarantine, which can make a difference quickly. She said 325 DHHS staff are being trained currently, and will work day and evening shifts. Smith said the team of DHHS staff will be culturally sensitive and start with the areas in Nebraska that have severe outbreaks tied to meatpacking plants.

Q&A

Q: Will there be guidance for Memorial Day events?

A: Ricketts: Plan on a 10-person limit.

Q: Why is Lancaster County not included in the loosening of restrictions?

A: Ricketts: Lancaster County’s DHM expires later than Douglas County’s, so it will be addressed later.

Q: Nebraska has not hit the peak yet, why loosen the restrictions?

A: Ricketts: Models are not predictions, and our state is basing our decision on hard data about health care capacity as well as testing data that shows the incoming need.

Q: Are you concerned about creating a surge?

A: Ricketts: We are only loosening restrictions in low incidence areas.

Q: Will churches be able to operate in high-incidence areas?

A: Ricketts: Yes, because it is a way to get the message out to minority communities.

Q: What about vulnerable people going back to church?

A: Ricketts: Those people should stay home, and nursing home residents should continue to not have visitors.

Federal:

Coronavirus Relief

Just a couple days after passing the latest \$484 coronavirus relief package through the Senate, Democratic leaders are strategizing the next package. ¹ Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said that the need for a fourth bill is great, and it needs to come “very soon.”

Schumer himself is under great pressure to address the needs of his home state of New York, and would like to see funds for local governments, the U.S. Postal Service, election reform, and hazard pay for essential workers included in the next package. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi says \$4 billion is needed in case states must move to vote-by-mail elections in November, to ensure all Americans can participate. However, conservative leaders are not convinced some of these measures are needed.

“The virus bailouts have already cost over \$2 trillion,” Sen. Ran Paul said. “Our annual deficit this year will approach \$4 trillion. We can’t continue on this course.” Senate Majority Speaker Mitch McConnell would prefer to see Congress address problems as they arise, and to not advance “preexisting partisan wish lists.”

Task Force

Nebraska Sens. Ben Sasse and Deb Fischer have been named to President Trump’s Opening Up America Again Congressional Group. ² The group is made up of both Republican and Democrat members of Congress, which will aide Trump in giving guidance to governors on how to best reopen their states. See quotes from Fischer and Sasse on their involvement below:

“I am proud to be a part of the bipartisan task force advising President Trump on reopening our economy,” Fischer said. “We had a productive conversation during our first call today. COVID-19 has hurt Nebraska families, businesses, and our state’s economy. Working together, we can develop safe first steps to begin getting people back to work.”

“This nasty virus has created an economic crisis that has forced millions of Americans out of work and put Nebraska families in unbelievably difficult situations,” Sasse said. “I am working around the clock to find solutions to responsibly open our economy back up. We’ve got to rescue small businesses with well-structured loans, fight for workers who lost their jobs, protect Nebraska agriculture, ramp up faster diagnostic testing, and hold China accountable.”

¹ <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/494019-battles-heats-up-for-phase-four-coronavirus-relief-bill>

² https://www.starherald.com/news/local_news/nebraska-senators-ben-sasse-deb-fischer-named-to-president-s-task-force/article_5edc4344-a0cc-5180-a2d8-1fc6ec99afd3.html