

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Friday urged New Mexicans to stay the course in the state’s fight against the spread of COVID-19 as a modified emergency public health order eases restrictions on retail operations and requires everyone to wear a cloth face covering in public, among other changes.

The new emergency health order, modified to acknowledge incremental progress against the novel coronavirus, takes effect Saturday as the previous order expires; it remains in effect through May 31, when further reopening could occur.

The new emergency order, in recognition of increased risk of transmission with additional economic openings, requires everyone to cover their faces in public, with exceptions for eating, drinking and exercise. Reusable cloth face-coverings are easy to make with common household items ([see explanatory video here](#)).

“I know this is not popular, but seat belts, child safety seats and airbags weren’t popular either when they were first adopted, and we know they save lives,” Gov. Lujan Grisham said. “Please: Wear a mask. It’s compassionate. It protects others, including frontline workers of all types, and we owe them a great debt of gratitude. Let us protect them and each other and our families.”

The extended order, attached to this news release and posted online at cv.nmhealth.org, also allows all retailers, beginning Saturday, to operate at 25 percent of their maximum occupancy as determined by fire code. In the interest of consistency, this now includes larger, “big box” retailers. A retailer is defined as any entity where the end-user or consumer is able to purchase a product within the retail space and does not include theaters, performance spaces, entertainment venues and does not yet include high-intensity contact services like dine-in at restaurants and bars, salons, gyms and tattoo parlors.

Houses of worship beginning Saturday may also operate at 25 percent occupancy, according to the public health order, authorized by Health Secretary Kathyleen Kunkel.

COVID-SAFE PRACTICES:

The emergency public health order mandates compliance with [COVID-safe practices](#), a series of requirements and best practices for businesses and other services – compiled with industry input and the oversight of the governor’s Economic Recovery Council – that will assure the safety of employees and customers. [Those COVID-safe practices are available for dissemination and download](#)

[at cv.nmhealth.org](http://cv.nmhealth.org) and newmexico.gov and at the link provided here. (The documents include COVID-safe practices for dine-in restaurant services, although those are not yet permissible, in order to allow restaurants and bars and other eateries to prepare for what practices will be required upon a later limited re-opening.)

“If New Mexicans don’t help us as we ease restrictions, we’ll see cases rise, and as they rise, we’ll have to shut down again. That’s the only tool I have,” the governor said. “If I can’t get New Mexicans to protect vulnerable populations, to protect our seniors and children and minority populations and homeless populations and essential workers and health care workers and first responders and so many more, I will do whatever it takes to protect them. But you can help me. And if we all do this together, we can keep easing restrictions in a safe manner and go on living in a COVID-19 world.”

On May 1, New Mexico State Parks allowed eight state parks to reopen for day use only. As of May 15, as the state continues to evaluate which areas are safe and can be regulated in line with public health needs, the agency has added nine more: Oasis,

Oliver Lee, Clayton Lake & Dinosaur Trackways, Pancho Villa, Mesilla Valley Bosque, Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, Coyote Creek, City of Rocks, Rockhound. Before visiting a state park, check www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SPD for hours of operation, visitor capacity guidelines, available facilities and group size restrictions.

Motor Vehicle Division field offices will reopen in a limited fashion June 1 with COVID-safe practices for appointment-only services that can't be completed online — for example, first-time REAL IDs, services for seniors, driving tests and VIN inspections. Early morning appointments will be reserved for seniors. Both employees and customers will wear face coverings. Staff will disinfect vehicles inside and touchpoints outside before and after driving tests/VIN inspections, and both employee and customer will be required to wear face coverings and gloves for those services.

The changes are part of New Mexico's phased plan for a safe and gradual reopening based on "[gating criteria](#)" that show a generally decreasing transmission rate, adequate testing, contact tracing and hospital capacity, and adequate supply of personal protective equipment.

The new order moves most of New Mexico from the Preparation Phase to Phase 1 based on small improvements in the transmission rate and the other gating criteria. However, the state continues to see statewide spread of the highly contagious virus. As of Friday, New Mexico had 5,662 reported positive cases and 253 reported fatalities associated with the virus. Two hundred and twenty three New Mexicans remain hospitalized.

"As we ease up on some restrictions, to make sure we don't have another outbreak, everyone needs to wear your mask and keep your distance," said Dr. David Scrase, Human Services Department secretary.

In line with the gating criteria, the amended public health order will again relax several restrictions on low-intensity contact services to relieve additional economic pressure.

WHAT REMAINS THE SAME:

- New Mexicans must remain home except for outings essential for health, safety and welfare, especially elderly and vulnerable individuals. If you must leave home, gatherings of more than five people remain prohibited and 6 feet of physical distance from others must be maintained.
- Locations and services where high-intensity contact is unavoidable — such as gyms, salons, indoor malls, tattoo parlors and dine-in service at restaurants and bars — remain temporarily closed. Limited in-person operations for those types of businesses could be included in the next modification of the public health order, as soon as early June, depending on New Mexico's rate of COVID-19 transmission, testing capacity and other gating criteria.
- Other high-intensity contact services that must remain closed include indoor malls, massage and tattoo parlors, theaters, casinos.
- A 14-day quarantine order remains in place for out-of-state airport arrivals.
- Vacation rentals are prohibited to out-of-state residents.

- Visits to long-term care and other congregate care facilities remain restricted.

WHAT WILL CHANGE BEGINNING MAY 16:

- All retailers may operate according to COVID-Safe Practices (“CSPs”) at 25 percent fire code occupancy. (A “retailer” is any business that sells goods directly to the ultimate consumer or end-users and does not include wholesalers or suppliers, nor does it include entertainment venues such as movie theaters, concert halls, or amusement parks);
- Large retailers like big-box stores and grocery stores may also operate at 25 percent capacity as determined by fire code.
- Non-essential businesses (other than retailers, such as office spaces, call centers) generally may operate according to CSPs at up to 25 percent of pre-crisis staffing levels. All employees should continue to work from home wherever possible.
- Houses of worship may operate at 25 percent occupancy.
- Masks will be required of everyone in public places, with exceptions for eating, drinking, and exercising and medical requirements.

The mask requirement is based in part on a recent study that found if 80 percent of us adopt a simple homemade face mask, we could reduce deaths from COVID-19 by 17-45 percent over two months, according to Dr. Scrase.

“All of us wearing masks could save thousands of lives,” he said.

The three counties – McKinley, San Juan and Cibola – in the state’s northwestern public health region that remains a COVID-19 hotspot are exempt from the new order but will be allowed to move into the preparation phase that began two weeks ago for the rest of the state. That means that in those counties, non-essential retailers may provide curbside pickup or delivery; golf courses, pet and veterinary services may open; and gun stores may operate by appointment. However, the order to stay home except for essential outings remains in place.

Assuming continued progress on the gating criteria (reduced transmission rates and adequate capacity for health care and supplies), higher-intensity contact could be phased in when the new order expires. That might include partially reopening salons, barbers, gyms, indoor malls, and dine-in at restaurants with limited occupancy and COVID-safe practices in place. Additionally, occupancy restrictions on houses of worship, motels and hotels could possibly expand in early June.