



AppHealthCare

Appalachian District Health Department
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Caring for our Community

September 8, 2021

Dear business leader,

The Appalachian District Board of Health recognizes the critical nature of public health services provided in Alleghany, Ashe, and Watauga Counties during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent further strain on the local healthcare resources, our economy, and to reduce preventable life losses caused by COVID-19.

Unfortunately, we know of over 9,500 lives impacted by COVID-19 in our health jurisdiction and we have lost 95 special community members due to this virus. Sadly, we have also recognized many businesses have battled not only prior closures, but now are desperately trying to remain staffed and able to serve.

As we continue to battle this latest wave of COVID-19 and consider how we slow the spread, we have two key actions available to us: vaccines and masks. We implore you to utilize both to help slow the spread of the virus in our communities and thereby lessen the impact to employers, schools, and others for individuals out for illness or quarantine.

Additionally, we ask you to consider the impacts to our local, regional, and statewide healthcare providers. We are grateful to have Alleghany Health, Ashe Memorial Hospital, and Appalachian Regional Healthcare System alongside many local healthcare providers working diligently to serve our communities with strained resources.

It is in the spirit of collaboration and interest in protecting the public's health from COVID-19 that we reach out to you to specifically urge your leadership and/or board to consider the following actions as soon as possible:

- Comply with existing or implement mask requirements indoors for all, regardless of vaccination status.
- Consider all actions available to you to encourage more of your employees and customers to be vaccinated including but not limited to sharing credible information about COVID-19 vaccines to dispel myths about the benefits of vaccination, allowing time for staff to be vaccinated, hosting a vaccine clinic, supporting alternate schedules to allow staff to complete their vaccination series, and considering policy changes that require vaccination for employees.
- Review the [NC DHHS Interim Guidance for Events and Festivals](#) if your business is planning to host or participate in a community event
- Find ways to encourage staff to stay home when they are sick. Employees who feel pressured to work while sick may expose others you serve and their coworkers, and may create a bigger impact on your ability to return to normal sooner rather than later.

BUSINESS OFFICE
157 Health Services Road
PO Box 309
Sparta, NC 28675
336-372-5641
336-372-7793 Fax

ALLEGHANY CO. HEALTH CENTER
157 Health Services Road
PO Box 309
Sparta, NC 28675
336-372-5641
336-372-7793 Fax

ASHE CO. HEALTH CENTER
413 McConnell Street
PO Box 208
Jefferson, NC 28640
336-246-9449
336-246-8163 Fax

WATAUGA CO. HEALTH CENTER
126 Poplar Grove Connector
PO Box 307
Boone, NC 28607
828-264-4995
828-264-4997 Fax

- Utilize the public health tools to navigate potential quarantine time for those unvaccinated. The best way to have support is by reaching out to the public health staff, by supporting those exposed to be tested whether they are vaccinated or not, and supporting public health guidance for isolating (for those testing positive) and quarantine (for those unvaccinated and exposed).
 - COVID-19 Message Line: 828-795-1970
 - COVID-19 Email: Preparedness@apphealth.com
- Help take out the stigma relating to seeking help for mental health and substance use disorder by reminding your staff of available resources that can help with the extreme stress faced by so many of us. There are several local providers who offer services, including us, but we also offer a reminder of this free resource: [Hope4NC](#) available 24/7 by calling or texting 1-855-587-3463.
- Reach out to our staff if you would like more information about ways you can limit the spread of COVID-19 in our communities

Some businesses in our community have already taken critical steps to help end this pandemic. We extend our sincere gratitude for your support of a healthy work environment and community by joining together to end this pandemic.

In closing, we want to urge you that this is a matter requiring quick, thoughtful action requiring all of us to demonstrate our care for our community over care of political position or, at times, popular opinion. It is about public health and about healthy businesses ready to serve a growing community into the future.

Our role as the Board of Health is to protect our community. We will continue to seek ways to protect those in our health district to help lessen the impact this terrible virus. Let's keep working together to lessen the impacts of this virus on our businesses, our healthcare facilities, and most importantly, our lives.

Thank you for your actions to-date and those we hope you will consider as a result of this request.

Sincerely,

David Triplett

Chair, Appalachian District Board of Health

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