



Press Release

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County Commissioners Send Governor Reopening Baker County Plan

The Baker County Commissioners today sent a plan to Governor Brown's office outlining a phased approach to reopening businesses, organizations and events in the County that are currently closed by the Governor's Stay Home, Save Lives Executive Order. Baker County's highest priority is the health and safety of the community. County officials also recognize that in our community, every business is an essential business. The plan proposes three phases for reopening different sectors, and includes measures that can be put in place to reduce the chance of transmitting COVID-19.

Baker County's plan was developed through coordination between the Baker County Commissioners, Baker County Health Department, St. Alphonsus Medical Center-Baker City, and the County Public Health Officer. It was developed based on Governor Kate Brown's Framework for Reopening Oregon that was introduced on April 14 for restarting "public life and business while maintaining healthy Oregon communities." Baker County's plan has been sent to the Governor's Office for review, but County officials caution they don't yet know when the plan may be approved or implemented.

Commissioner Mark Bennett stated, "We expect there will be questions from the Governor's office, and we may need to make adjustments or additions to the plan. However, we know how important it is to our community as a whole to be able to reopen, and we assure you this is our highest priority. Moving forward will probably be slower than anyone would like to see, but we recognize we'll need to approach reopening thoughtfully but steadily to avoid having to start over. We look forward to hearing from the Governor's office on our proposed plan. If our plan is approved, we will begin working with businesses and organizations to get ready to reopen."

The County plan recognizes "adaptive management" will be needed to update the plan as the situation evolves, and creates a new Business/Medical Case Review Unit as part of the Incident Command structure, to "continuously monitor the situation and identified Management Action Point metrics as part of an information-based, phased approach to re-opening." The plan addresses that the County continues to have no COVID-19 positive cases, declining visits to medical clinics with COVID-19 like symptoms; sufficient personal protective equipment and hospital surge capacity; a testing, tracing and isolation strategy; and strategies for protecting the most vulnerable populations, including those living in long term care facilities or experiencing homelessness.

The reopening plan is divided into three phases with multiple steps. Phases will be spaced apart by at least two weeks, and data for any cases and hospitalizations will be reviewed by the Business/Medical Case Review Unit before a decision is made to hold at the current phase, modify or move back a step if the situation warrants, or move forward to the next phase.

Baker County, along with ten other eastern Oregon counties, signed a letter on April 13 asking Governor Brown to allow rural counties to reopen as soon as May 1st. The letter states, "For all rural areas, time is of the essence. When restrictions are lifted we do not have the population to recover in a few weeks or days as in the metropolitan or large city areas, it will take the better part of a year. Even businesses that are deemed essential under the guidelines are struggling. They need the whole community working. We are confident your office can consider reopening on a regional basis, where public health risks are reduced based on our population density and community size, but where the economic fall-out is on the edge of becoming cataclysmic."