



**For immediate release
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With new Yuba-Sutter public health orders, more businesses could operate with safety protocols; facial coverings now required in public

Yuba-Sutter Health Officer Dr. Phuong Luu today issued a new public health order to allow certain lower risk businesses to open with appropriate modifications.

Utilizing guidance from the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, Dr. Luu has determined that in this initial phase of a reopening of the community, lower risk businesses that can be considered for reopening are those that are low-medium risk for contact intensity **and** low-medium risk for number of contacts.

Contact intensity relates to how long close contact is occurring – several minutes, half an hour, three hours, etc.

Lower risk businesses must have appropriate modifications to address COVID-19 infection prevention, and publish such modifications protocol to the public and provide them to their employees.

An accompanying public health order requires use of facial coverings in public when social distancing is not possible.

Both orders are effective at 12:01 a.m. on Monday, May 4. They will replace a previous local order dated April 6 that expires at the end of the day Sunday, May 3.

“Proximity and duration of exposure to COVID-19, and not whether a business is considered ‘essential’ to government infrastructure, should guide the decision making regarding what types of businesses and organizations should be allowed to initially open,” Dr. Luu said.

Regarding the facial coverings order, Dr. Luu noted that roughly 20 percent of confirmed cases are in individuals showing no symptoms and emphasized the important role played by residents in slowing the transmission of COVID-19.

“As the Yuba-Sutter community embarks on a phased-in gradual reopening of our community, it is critical that all community members take upon themselves the responsibility to adhere to important public health recommendations to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. Non-pharmacological interventions of social distancing of six feet or more, frequent hand washing with soap and water or use of hand sanitizer, staying home if ill with fever, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath, and wearing facial coverings while social distancing is not possible are key.

Addressing the most vulnerable population, the order requires those 65 and older, or anyone with a chronic medical condition that places them at greater risk, to remain at home for other than necessary activities of medical care or nutrition for themselves or their family members, or to perform work or recreational activities, but must at all times adhere to non-

pharmacologic interventions of social distancing, frequent hand washing or use of hand sanitizer, staying home if ill, and wearing facial coverings when social distancing is not possible.

“Individuals must take upon themselves the responsibility to restrict their daily movements as much as possible to essential, common sense movements to allow for necessary work, sustenance, and recreation to maintain physical, mental, and economic health,” the order states.

Many businesses can reopen under modified rules

Under the new orders, restaurants, retail operations, shopping malls, construction, real estate, agriculture, gyms and fitness studios, hair salons and barbershops, nail salons, spas, massage therapy centers, and tattoo parlors are all allowed to operate as long as appropriate business modifications are made to adhere to social distancing and other tenets of combating COVID-19. Businesses would be required to develop and publish operational protocols to be placed at a public entrance for employees and customers to see.

The use of parks, athletic fields, playgrounds, and libraries would be allowable activities by individuals who practice social distancing. Where social distancing is not possible while in public—if you cannot maintain six feet of separation from those not in your household—facial coverings are now required.

Public transportation will remain open under the order.

Schools, places of worship, theatres cannot open yet

Not allowed under the new local order, but could be considered in a future phase if COVID-19 hospitalizations remain low, are activities at schools, places of worship, theatres, museums, and other indoor leisure spaces, bars and nightclubs that do not provide food, indoor and outdoor concert and sport venues, contact school sports, institutions of higher education, residence halls and other overnight programs, community centers, or mass gatherings related to sports, religion, business, entertainment, and politics.

All social gatherings of more than 10 people are prohibited by the order, including block parties, birthday parties, funerals, weddings, christenings, etc.

Gatherings of fewer than 10 that include people not from the same household must include social distancing.

Rationale for the new order

During briefings for county and city officials and local health care representatives this week, Dr. Luu stressed that while COVID-19 is currently the top medical concern for residents of Yuba and Sutter counties, it is not the only health concern. The pandemic is placing a strain on Behavioral Health resources, and the long-term health of the community can be negatively impacted by the strain of financial uncertainty.

“COVID-19 is dangerous and scary but it is not the only health issue,” Dr. Luu said. “We cannot wait for a vaccine without seeing extreme economic damage done to our community. The consequences of waiting will be additional health concerns brought on by stress and the very real dilemma for those with limited resources whether to buy life-saving food or life-saving medicines. As the Bi-County Health Officer, I have to think of the totality of health for the entire community.”

Early implementation of social distancing in Yuba-Sutter and throughout California has reduced transmission of COVID-19 and saved lives. The rate of new cases in Yuba-Sutter has

plateaued for the past three weeks, and it has plateaued in the more populated counties bordering Yuba-Sutter for almost two weeks, Dr. Luu said.

There are more tools available for identifying cases and performing contact tracing. A new testing site opening May 4 will increase testing dramatically, and additional public health employees are being trained to do the contact tracing necessary for each new confirmed case and their associated close contacts.

“Our residents have done a good job reducing the rate of new cases through social distancing, and that has allowed us to reach the next phase, but we cannot go from zero to 100 percent opening up right away,” said Dr. Luu. “We must have a gradual reopening, one that is phased in, one that is evidence-based, risk-stratified, and grounded in science.”

The orders have no ending date, will continually be reviewed, and can be modified at any time, Dr. Luu said. More business activity can be considered in the future if this phase is a success, or further restrictions considered if the rate of transmission accelerates to a point it threatens to overwhelm hospital capacity.

Dr. Luu cautioned that an expected rise in the number of cases due to increase local testing should not be interpreted as a “surge” in the rate of transmission. The best barometer of the status of the COVID-19 threat in our community is the number of hospitalizations as related to COVID-19.

Responsibility on citizens and business owners

All businesses, including those that are currently operating as “essential” businesses, will be required to develop and publish business modification plans—called COVID-19 Operations Protocols—describing how they will function to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. Protocols can include things such as signage, strategies for social distancing, employee health screening, barriers, frequent disinfection of high touch surfaces, and customer education, particularly as it relates to remaining six feet apart and wearing a facial covering when that is not possible.

Yuba-Sutter officials have developed business protocol templates in multiple languages, and a tool kit, to assist local businesses in development of the protocols. They are available at bepreparedyuba.org and bepreparedsutter.org.

“The new local order places a lot of responsibility on the citizens and business owners of Yuba and Sutter counties to make good decisions,” Dr. Luu said. “Please don’t take the change of rules in the new order as a signal we are out of the woods and to act irresponsibly. On the contrary, please respect the new order, please respect the rules established by businesses so that they can open under the order, please respect your fellow citizens by practicing social distancing and wearing facial coverings where you cannot maintain six feet of space from others.”

Conflicts with state order

Sutter County Administrative Officer Steven M. Smith, and Yuba County Administrative Officer Robert Bendorf, acknowledged the shift in emphasis to a risk-based order conflicts with the Governor’s emphasis on “essential vs. non-essential” activities. They also acknowledged that residents and businesses of Yuba and Sutter counties are also subject to the orders of the Governor and the State Public Health Officer. The counties cannot provide legal advice, however, and recommend businesses deemed non-essential in the Governor’s order seek their own advice from private legal counsel in considering their options.

“The intent of the order is to comply with both the Governor’s order and President Trump’s ‘Opening up America Again’ guidelines,” Dr. Luu said. “The purpose is to continue to

mitigate the spread of the virus to the greatest extent possible while addressing the need to gradually reopen the economy in order to ensure vital services are resumed in a safe manner.”

For copies of the orders, Frequently Asked Questions, business operational protocol templates, and a business “toolkit”, visit bepreparedyuba.org or bepreparedsutter.org