



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: June 10, 2020

Contacts: cdalton@co.routt.co.us
rschepper@co.routt.co.us

Board of Health Decides to Pursue Variance Request for Events and Gatherings

Public Health Department Gives Update on Disease Prevalence

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO — In a two-hour Board of Health meeting today, the Board of County Commissioners asked the Public Health Department to gather the documentation necessary to request a gathering size variance from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). The Commissioners recommended a phased approach for gathering size starting with 50 people inside and 125 people outside, with strict mitigation protocols in place. The Public Health Department also gave an update on disease prevalence in the County.

Gathering Size

According to the [state's website for variance requests](#), "variances will be assessed based on the level of virus transmission in a particular county, the level of exposure risk of the proposed activity, and the comprehensiveness of the proposed prevention plan. Variances are more likely to be approved for low-exposure activities with high abilities to do prevention, such as recreation in "park-like" environments where people do not have interactions with members outside of their household, and where it's feasible to require mask wearing. Variances are unlikely to be approved for activities that have higher exposure risks where it is difficult to do prevention, such as concerts, bars, nightclubs, amusement parks, fairs, and festivals."

The Commissioners and Public Health Officials discussed how CDPHE evaluates communities on disease prevalence and what the threshold for Routt County is. Commissioner Beth Melton shared her calculations, "With CDPHE saying any county would be at low spread at 25 cases per 100,000 over two weeks, Routt County would have to stay at about 6.5 cases in two weeks to stay at a low level. The medium level would be 13 cases over two weeks and a high level of transmission would be 26 cases in a two-week period. With these numbers and our commitment to a phased approach, I think we should take a phased approach to gathering size and not jump to 250 people from a 10-person gathering size."

Chairman Tim Corrigan agreed, "If we look around the state, variances have been approved for 50 in the gathering size. Let's look at different interval approaches and collect data for 30 days to see where we are. In looking at the state's website for variances, I would recommend that we start at 50 inside and 125 outside for 30 days. If we are doing well then we can try for the next

level of 100 people indoors and 175 outdoors for the next 30 days, and then try for 175 indoors and 250 outdoors. I think it makes sense for the state to know our strategy and to give businesses and our community some sense of where we are trying to go in the coming months.”

“I’ve been in support of changing the gathering size so our local events can happen. We have youth events with live animals and other community events that are part of our tradition that a gathering size of 50 would make possible. We may not be able to have spectators, but at least the kids and their parents could participate,” added Commissioner Doug Monger.

The Commissioners reiterated that even with a change in gathering size, there still would need to be strict mitigation protocol of physical distancing of six feet, mask wearing indoors, and other ways to limit the spread of the virus – a variance request would not be accepted by the state without strict protocols. The Commissioners tasked the Public Health Department to prepare the variance request for next Tuesday’s Board meeting.

Disease Prevalence in Routt County

Director of Public Health, Kari Ladrow, gave the Commissioners a report on the health of Routt County. “We had 28,347 cases in Colorado as of yesterday and 301 outbreaks across the state. The biggest outbreaks continue to be in assisted living, congregate care, and grocery stores. These state outbreaks helped us develop our strategy of community and on-site testing. We are developing partnerships with restaurants and other employers like Steamboat Resorts and Rex Brice’s restaurants to test employees. During the time of May 31 to June 6, 414 tests were administered community-wide.”

Ms. Ladrow also reported that the active case of the 90-year old male at Casey’s Pond has completely recovered. Dr. Brian Harrington, Routt County’s Medical Officer gave updates on antibody testing and wearing facemasks. “In Routt County, five different clinical entities are providing antibody tests. So far, 522 individuals have been tested for antibodies and only 11 were positive, which represents a 2.1% prevalence in Routt County. As a community, we are just as susceptible as we were at the beginning of this pandemic, and we continue to lack the evidence with which to interpret antibody results. For now, all we can say is that the presence of antibodies just implies an immune response to a prior infection. Furthermore, not all antibody tests have a high enough sensitivity or specificity to assure accurate results in populations with low rates of disease exposure. A test with 93% sensitivity applied to a population like ours with a prevalence less than 5% is more likely to give a false positive result than a true positive. The low immune response prevalence requires a sensitivity of 99 or 100% sensitivity to assure high accuracy of positive results.

Face Masks

The Commissioners had preliminary discussions on what information they would need to decide whether to extend Public Health Order #3, which is in effect through June 22. Dr. Harrington disputed some common arguments against community mask wearing. “Wearing a mask plays a role in our disease mitigation strategy. It is a cost-effective way to stop the spread of the

disease. I have seen some community comments that I would like to refute about masks. One of the most important points is that wearing a mask is about protecting others, not about protecting yourself. Some have said that wearing a mask makes you touch your face more, or that masks give a false sense of security so that people forgo other measures like washing hands. However, there is no proof that those theories translate into higher infection rates. In countries where mask wearing is the norm, disease prevalence is lower, not higher. For some people with medical conditions, mask wearing is not advised, but for the majority of the population mask wearing is a simple way we can keep the COVID-19 virus from spreading further.”

Construction Guidance

Also in the meeting, Todd Carr, Regional Building Department Director, received approval from the Commissioners to rescind the construction guidance letter. The Regional Building Department said the construction industry would still have to follow state public health orders, as well as Routt County’s Public Health Order #3.

###