



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Routt County Board of Health Confirms Restaurants Use the County Variance Public Health Department Gives Update on COVID-19 in Routt County**

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STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO (June 3, 2020) – The Board of Health today confirmed that restaurants in Routt County will follow the County’s variance on restaurants and not the State’s guidance. In addition, the Public Health Department gave its weekly report on disease prevalence in Routt County, highlighting that Routt County’s social distancing score has gone down since mid-April.

The Board of Health discussed the restaurant variance at the request of the Steamboat Restaurant Association. Restaurants were able to start conducting on-site dining on May 24 after the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) approved Routt County’s variance request. Shortly after, Governor Polis approved on-site dining for all restaurants in Colorado with strict protocols. The state and county restaurant guidances were not the same and restaurants were confused on which protocol to follow. For example, the County variance allowed microbreweries to open if they could meet social distancing requirements, but the state guidance said they were not allowed to open. According to the [fifth amended state public health order](#), “The following places of public accommodation remain closed to ingress, egress, use, and occupancy by members of the public: 1. Bars, taverns, brew pubs, breweries, microbreweries, distillery pubs, wineries, tasting rooms, special licensees, clubs, and other places of public accommodation offering alcoholic beverages for on-premises consumption unless the establishment ensures access to food from a licensed retail food establishment for on-premise consumption;...”

The Commissioners agreed to keep the Routt County variance for restaurants. “I don’t want to pick winners and losers. We have allowed restaurants and microbreweries to open, and I don’t think it’s fair for any establishment to have to close after they just opened up,” said Commissioner Doug Monger.

At the meeting, public health officials also gave an update on the health of Routt County. “The detected prevalence of COVID-19 infections in our community remains low. Our last death, a Casey’s Pond resident, was on May 1. We had another positive case at Casey’s Pond on May 27, an asymptomatic resident. We had another probable case in our community, an out-of-state resident who likely acquired his infection in his home state but tested positive here and was flown to a Front Range tertiary care center May 30. This represents our first hospitalization since April 1. Just before this Board of Health meeting I learned of another positive test in Routt County of a young adult who had a positive screening test on June 1 in preparation for an elective surgery. We will be getting more information on this case later today,” said Dr. Brian Harrington, County Medical Officer.

Kari Ladrow, Routt County’s Public Health Director also shared some interesting state statistics that is helping inform the Department’s testing strategy. “There have been 26,788 cases in Colorado and we are looking at outbreaks. There have been 10 outbreaks in Colorado grocery stores that have led to five deaths; seven outbreaks at restaurants; and a number of outbreaks of inmates and staff at Colorado jails. We want to keep this in context as we continue our community testing efforts.”

The Commissioners asked questions about the new score Routt County has from [Unacast](#) that determines social distancing data in counties all over the United States. Routt County fell to a C- from an A. Dr. Harrington explained the score in more detail, “I wish to highlight the Unacast social distancing scoreboard, which uses cell phone location data. Unacast looks at three metrics, as compared to the pre-pandemic baseline: 1) the change in average distance traveled; 2) the change in non-essential visits; and 3) the change in probability of human encounters. On April 18, Routt county citizens had reduced these metrics over 70% from baseline, which contributed to controlling the spread of disease in our community. However, we have now fallen to the 25-40% range decrease from our baseline. This is not surprising, and in line with our intent to open up society and the economy. However, relaxation of social distancing to lower levels (45% or lower) is predicted to lead to a surge in sick people. Model findings indicate that increased mask wearing will help control the COVID-19 epidemic. We need to continue our prevention practices.”

Commissioner Beth Melton stressed the need for more nuanced education about what they can do to help stop community spread as we open up to more tourists and other visitors. “I don't think everyone over the age of 60 should have to stay locked in their house for the next few months to stay safe, but we need to be conscious of every contact we make. What are the safe things we can do? Going to a restaurant twice a week can be safe with correct mitigation protocol, but meeting with a different group of 10 people every day for a week is more challenging. Imagine if it was your kid and they were in a different 10-person playgroup every day, by the end of the week they could be in contact with 50 kids and their families. It is the exponential growth of contacts that has potential to create unmanageable disease spread.”

The Commissioners also discussed the variance request process and noted that the County is the one that requests the variances and the Public Health Department writes those requests. They noted that many of the business and community activities they would like to see reopened are being addressed by the state’s new public health order, including places of worship, outdoor pools and hot springs, youth and adult sports leagues, gyms, and outdoor recreation. The state guidance will be finalized on June 4 and details will be found at <https://covid19.colorado.gov/safer-at-home>. A variance the Commissioners may consider in the future concerns gathering size, but they emphasized the need for data driven decision-making and using the information from the County’s new [dashboard](#).

“Let’s move forward and get the information for requests from the different industry groups, and at the same time allow time for Public Health to track the data before we make any variance requests. It will take time to review everything, but I am all for doing what’s right for Routt County,” said Commissioner Tim Corrigan.

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