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Routt County Board of Health Extends Local Public Health Order 2020-03

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO — During the Board of Health Meeting today, the Routt County Commissioners decided to extend Public Health Order 2020-03 until the end of July. This Public Health Order continues the requirement for businesses to post their site mitigation plans in a visible location and customers and employees to wear masks in public places. The Commissioners made amendments to allow customers in gyms to remove their masks while exercising, as well as adding self-certification requirements for events. All three Commissioners voted yes to extend the Public Health Order.

Board Chairman Tim Corrigan said, “Nothing much has changed since we enacted this Public Health Order. I will lead off with the same concern I have always voiced. I would not be comfortable with the concept that employees are required to wear masks per the state order to keep customers safe, and then not require customers to wear facemasks to keep employees safe. It would be unfair. We have hung our hat on incremental approaches. If we take off the mask requirement, we will not know which intervention is working while we increase gathering size. We need time to see which prevention measures are working. If we get to the end of July with increased gathering sizes and the disease prevalence is still low, we could come to a different decision. I still agree with our Public Health Department that wearing a mask is one of the simplest, low-cost tools we have to open up the economy and get back to normal.”

During the meeting, the Commissioners discussed the request made by the Chamber and Gyms industry group to allow customers to remove their masks while exercising. The County Medical Officer, Dr. Brian Harrington, said, “Gyms remain a high touch, high spread area, which is why they opened later. There continues to be growing evidence for wearing masks to stop the spread of COVID-19. When masks are not required, social distancing is needed. If we get a surge in cases, gyms will have to be revisited. Most people are getting by wearing a mask in gyms, which depends on the level of exertion and the health of the individual. I would recommend that individuals still need to wear a mask when entering and leaving a facility and maintain a physical distance.”

The amended language for the public health order says, *“All employees and customers must cover their nose and mouth with a face covering, unless the nature of the business requires the removal of the face-covering. While encouraged, masks are not required for individuals actively engaged in physical exercise so long as the social distancing requirements set forth herein and all other state and local mitigation protocols are observed.”* To see the full Public Health Order [click here](#).

Commissioner Doug Monger advocated for allowing Hayden and South Routt to be exempt from the facemask requirement, but Commissioners Corrigan and Beth Melton said that in order to apply for the next phase, “Protect Our Neighbors,” Routt County needs to be consistent and have a county-wide approach in order to meet the requirements from the state. Dr. Harrington added, “We have had cases in all parts of Routt County. It’s hard to just separate where we reside and work. I think the risks are fairly consistent in all parts of our county.”

“I am still concerned whether it is reasonable and necessary to have masks everywhere? Many of our neighboring counties do not have mask requirements. Masks continue to be a lightning rod for our citizens. I think we should fall back on the state orders. However, I am going to vote for this extension of the Public Health Order because getting the variance approved provides opportunities to open and get back to business,” said Commissioner Monger.

In the final comments, Commissioner Melton added, “Facemasks are critical to re-opening and potentially preventing a second wave. We know that different communities make different decisions about how to manage the virus. What we are doing is clearly working for us because our disease prevalence is so low. I am in support of continuing this. I am thinking about winter already. We need to continue all of our prevention efforts so we are in the best position possible moving forward towards our winter season.”

As part of the variance request to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), Routt County added a provision to increase the likelihood that the state would grant the variance request, called self-certification. Currently, the site mitigation protocol in Public Health Order 2020-03 requires businesses to post their mitigation plans in a visible location for viewing by employees and customers. The self-certification addition would require event planners to send their event plans and details to a County drop box. The intent of the self-certification would be for the County to understand how many events are taking place county-wide and have the ability to contact event organizers if a positive case is identified and contact tracing is needed.

Public Health Update

Kari Ladrow, Routt County Public Health Director, provided an update as well. “Our case count remains at 63 cases. The local outbreak at Casey’s Pond is contained and Public Health continues the vulnerable population task force. Our testing strategy is two-pronged, we continue community testing – we set up overflow testing for Thursday since all of our appointment were booked today, and we are partnering with local businesses and organizations to test employees. We want to continue building the capacity of our Public Health Department so we can apply for the “Protect Our Neighbors” phase and open up the economy even more.”

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