

State health department releases information on Protect-Our-Neighbors certification

Local communities will only be able to qualify if they meet certain criteria

DENVER, July 7, 2020: Today the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) released a guide and application form to allow local communities to apply for Protect-Our-Neighbors certification. Communities can only apply if they meet eight criteria—including declining cases—and have attestation letters from hospitals, public health experts and local officials. Because cases are increasing in many counties throughout the state, most counties will not yet be eligible to apply for Protect Our Neighbors.

Local communities will be able to qualify for this status to gain more local control in their communities if they meet certain criteria, including low viral transmission and preparedness of the public health agency to successfully respond to an increase in cases. Once communities meet certification criteria, submit a surge mitigation plan, and are approved by the state, they will be able to permit activities at 50% of pre-pandemic capacity, with at least 6 feet between non-household members, and no more than 500 people in one setting at a time. The [guide to apply for Protect Our Neighbors is available here](#) and the [form to apply for certification is available here](#).

The state also released information on how local communities can apply for planning and infrastructure grants. [More information on grants are available here](#).

“We know that most Colorado communities are not ready to move into Protect Our Neighbors yet,” said Jill Hunsaker Ryan, executive director of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. “But we wanted to make sure we shared these guidelines so communities could start planning. Preparing for this thoughtfully will help keep Colorado safe.”

In order for a community to qualify for Protect-Our-Neighbors certification status they must meet eight metrics in the following categories:

- Low disease transmission levels (including stable or declining COVID-19 hospitalizations or fewer new cases in the past two weeks),
- Local public health agency capacity for testing, case investigation, contact tracing, and outbreak response (including the ability to test 15 people per 10,000 residents per day; the ability to conduct case investigation and contact tracing for at least 85% of assigned cases within 24 hours; a plan that documents the ability to investigate and contact trace their share, based on population, of our state’s overall 500 cases per day goal; and strategies to offer testing to close contacts of outbreak-associated cases)

- Hospital ability to meet the needs of all patients and handle the surge in demand for intensive hospital care (including the capacity to manage a 20% surge in hospital admissions/patient transfers and two weeks of PPE available.)

Protect Our Neighbors requires all Coloradans to continue to support and protect people who are at [increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19](#), including older adults and people with underlying medical conditions. Different communities may be in different phases -- Stay-At-Home, Safer-At-Home, or Protect Our Neighbors - - and may move between levels during this pandemic. Communities that are able to loosen restrictions under Protect Our Neighbors may need to tighten restrictions again to Safer-at-Home or Stay-at-Home levels if they see case increases, outbreaks, or a surge on their hospital systems.

Communities that cannot meet certification criteria for Protect Our Neighbors are able to apply for [variances at Safer at Home](#). When applying for a variance, counties must clearly indicate which provisions the county is requesting a variance from and describe preventive measures the county will require to meet the intent state's orders.

For extensive information on Protect-Our-Neighbors, including guidance for communities to qualify for this phase, please visit covid19.colorado.gov/protect-our-neighbors.

Continue to stay up to date by visiting covid19.colorado.gov.