

State health department releases Protect-Our-Neighbors roadmap

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

DENVER, June 30, 2020: The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) today announced the final roadmap for local communities to qualify for the Protect our Neighbors phase of the COVID-19 response. 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.

“This is the gold standard of pandemic preparedness, and it is a goal for our communities to aspire to. Not all of our communities will be able to achieve this goal immediately, ” said Jill Hunsaker Ryan, executive director of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. “It’s going to be up to all of us to keep wearing masks, washing our hands, and keeping our distance. We need to all do our part to keep transmissions low and prevent a surge on our hospital systems.”

Next week, CDPHE will provide more information and training on the process for applying for certification, as well as grant funding that will be available to help communities enhance their COVID-19-related planning and infrastructure.

Three things will enable a community to qualify for Protect-Our-Neighbors certification status:

- 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.)

A county may seek to qualify for Protect Our Neighbors by themselves, or voluntarily form a “region” with neighboring counties. Communities that can demonstrate strong public health and health care systems -- paired with low virus levels -- can take on more control over their own reopening plans and help the state avoid statewide shutdowns.

“Protect Our Neighbors empowers local governments, public health agencies and partners to meet the needs of their communities and scale their response,” said Hunsaker Ryan. “If communities are successful in controlling the outbreak locally, the state will not have to rely on suppressing the virus through extreme statewide shutdowns.”

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. It’s important to remember that 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.

The Protect-Our-Neighbors metrics were drafted by a workgroup consisting of epidemiologists and public health experts from the CDPHE, the University of Colorado School of Public Health, and local public health agencies from across the state. The group included representatives from urban, rural and frontier counties. In addition, the workgroup consulted health care coalitions and health care systems leadership in drafting treatment metrics. They met over the course of five sessions and reviewed scientific literature, case studies, and expert consultation to develop metrics that would achieve the goal of ensuring that they signify a systems readiness for broader reopening.

In order to help support communities' ability to achieve success, the state is making additional federal CARES Act funding available:

- Planning Grant of up to \$50,000 to engage consultants and community partners, and to fund community engagement efforts with communities impacted by and at increased risk.
- Infrastructure Strengthening Grants of up to \$300,000 (up to \$150,000 in state funds + local match) to invest in technology; community resource coordination; communication activities to increase compliance with the public health orders; funding for community-based partners and cultural brokers; and enhanced prevention and containment efforts.

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

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