

11.22 GOV REMARKS

****as prepared for delivery***

- Good afternoon and thank you all for joining me in this virtual format today for this press conference. As many of you know, I tested positive for COVID. I'm feeling good and am not experiencing any symptoms.
- I cannot stress enough my sincere gratitude to all the health officials who assisted me through this process - as a State we owe them a debt of gratitude for their continued service throughout this entire pandemic.
- Although I'm not experiencing symptoms, many Nevadans who become infected with COVID do. My heart goes out to all those who are sick with this virus now, and especially to the families of the more than 2,000 Nevadans who died from COVID-19. Not a day goes by where I don't think about these families and their grief.
- All of you are aware of the escalating COVID-19 cases in our nation and in our state. Almost two weeks ago, I asked that we step up our efforts to mitigate the spread of this dangerous and highly contagious virus.
- I've been in constant contact with our public health leaders, economics experts, our vaccination preparation team and many others to assess our current surge and possible next

steps.

- As of today, 13 of 17 of our counties are flagged for elevated risk of transmission. In the beginning of October, only 2 counties were flagged. Our statewide positivity rate is at a record 16.5 percent, and as I mentioned, we've surpassed 2,000 deaths.
- Just recently, we experienced a record number of daily cases – 2,416 in just one day. Our previous record was 1,639 in July. Today we once again had over 2,000 cases reported – 817 in Washoe County alone – greatly exceeding their previous record.
- Our case rate growth is at wildfire levels – even outpacing neighboring states, such as Arizona. All available models indicate that Nevada is in a “red zone” and our health experts anticipate continued case growth based on current trends.
- In fact, 10% of all COVID cases recorded in Nevada since the beginning of the pandemic were reported in the last seven days. Every minute, a Nevadan is diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Our hospitals are experiencing record numbers and as you heard from Dr. Tony Slonim of Renown a couple weeks ago, they've started treating patients in an alternative care site in

the parking lot.

- Some of our hospitals are experiencing staffing shortages because they have become infected or their family members have been diagnosed with COVID and workers are in quarantine.
- Due to massive increase in community spread, we are experiencing significant outbreaks in our institutional settings, including our correctional facilities.
- Our public health infrastructure – from our hospitals to our state health response – is quickly becoming overwhelmed. And from the start I've made clear that in addition to saving lives, one of the main goals of our response is to protect our public health system and our hospitals from being overwhelmed.
- Let me explain this quickly: whether you believe in the science of COVID or not, the reality is this – COVID is filling up our hospital beds and that threatens all Nevadans.
- If hospital beds continue filling at this rate and staffing shortages continue to increase as they are now – that means ALL Nevadans will have limited access to the care they may need.

- It's not just for COVID –if you get in a car accident, or have a heart attack, or break a wrist...you won't be able to access care if our hospitals are full and there isn't enough staff.
- This is our biggest threat. You saw it in New York, you can see it in El Paso right now. This can't become our reality.
- There is consensus on one inescapable conclusion: **we are on a rapid trajectory that threatens to overwhelm our health care system, our frontline health workers, and your access to care. So it's time to act.**
- From the start of this pandemic, there aren't any decisions that don't have negative consequences. Weighing the loss of jobs and businesses versus the loss of health and lives is painful, without a perfect solution.
- While prioritizing the health and safety of Nevadans, I am also balancing the significant ramifications that further restrictions will have on our suffering economy. No state struggles with this more than Nevada due to the lack of diversity in our economy.
- I've mentioned this high wire act before – this great balancing act - and I feel like we've been living in this no-win situation for nearly nine months.

- And believe me, I understand the stress - emotionally, mentally and economically - that you are all going through.
- Today, I'm announcing new restrictions, in an effort to get this wildfire under control. **I'm not issuing a shutdown order.** My goal is to aggressively try to attack this spread, while maintaining some portion of our economy and our daily life.
- That's why I am announcing that effective Tuesday at 12:01 a.m., Nevada will be operating under a STATEWIDE PAUSE. with the following conditions. **We will keep these restrictions in place for at least the next three weeks – I'll talk more about next steps soon.**
- First, I am strengthening Nevada's mask mandate across the board. Nevadans and visitors are now required to wear a mask at all times when you are around someone who is not part of your immediate household -- whether indoors or outdoors. This expansion includes requiring masks during private gatherings – I will talk more about private gatherings in a minute.
- In the last month or so, new research has emerged that continues to validate the importance of wearing a mask. They continue to be an essential tool in our fight.

- Going forward, we will reduce capacity in certain high-risk areas that have been shown nationally and in Nevada to contribute to the spread of COVID-19.
- Under this Statewide Pause, no additional businesses will be closed, but capacity limits and new mitigation measures will be imposed on both businesses and gatherings. I will start by explaining what's changing:

Restaurants & Bars: Currently operating at 50% capacity.

- Under the Statewide Pause, they may continue to operate under strict social distancing requirements at 25% occupancy - indoor and outdoor.
- **No more than 4 patrons per table** and seating at bar or counter tops must continue to be socially distanced under the existing guidelines.
- Restaurants and bars should continue to have hand sanitizer available and should be conducting health screenings and/or temperature checks.
- For restaurants and bars that serve food, **reservations are required - no walk-ins.**

- I know the majority of our bars and restaurants are doing their best, but these settings are proven to be high risk because they allow the opportunity for people to remove their face coverings in indoor settings around people outside of their household. That's how the virus spreads.
- That's also why I encourage curbside, delivery, and/or carry out operations, and why our health experts want to remind Nevadans and visitors that you must keep your mask on at all times when you are not actively eating or drinking, regardless of whether you are six feet away from others or not.
- If you chose to dine indoors, keep your mask on as much as possible. I encourage restaurants and bars to try to expand outdoor seating options, and I encourage local governments to work with these businesses to meet this goal.

Gyms, Fitness & Dance Studios and places like martial arts studios: Currently operating at 50% capacity.

- Under the Pause, they may operate with no more than **25% occupancy** under strict social distancing requirements.

- We are also strengthening our mask mandate with no exceptions for indoor exercise. Masks **MUST** be worn at all times, unless you're actively drinking. **If the activity is too strenuous to be done while wearing a mask properly, you must seek an alternative.**

Other businesses that will be moving from **50% to 25% capacity** during this pause include the following:

- Museums, Art Galleries, Libraries;
- Zoos & Aquariums;
- Arcades, Racetracks, Bowling Alleys, Mini Golf,
- Amusement and Theme Parks and other similar activities;

- Additionally, **Gaming operations** will be restricted to have no more than 25% occupancy and must operate pursuant to requirements issued by the Nevada Gaming Control Board, including health and safety policies. Restaurants and bars within gaming establishments will be restricted to the 25% capacity under the Statewide Pause.

PUBLIC GATHERINGS

- Recently, we took great steps to increase gathering size to 250 people or 50 percent, whichever is less. Unfortunately, due to the surge we are experiencing, we must decrease those limits during the Pause.
- Public gatherings will be **limited to no more than 50 individuals or 25 percent of fire code capacity, whichever is less**, under strict social distancing requirements.
- **This includes places of worship**, indoor movie theaters, live theater performances, casino showrooms, weddings, funerals, milestone celebrations and any other event where members of the public may be gathering together at the same time, in the same place, for the same purposes.
- No large gathering plans will be approved during this time. Again, **ALL gatherings MUST be limited to 50 people or 25 percent, whichever is less**. If larger events have been approved to take place in the next 3-week period, they must be canceled.

PRIVATE GATHERINGS

- **In addition to public gatherings, this Statewide Pause will also include new and necessary limitations on** private social gatherings. We know a significant source of spread is right in our homes – and we must do all that we can to prevent it.
- Under the Statewide Pause, private gatherings will be restricted to **10 people or fewer, from no more than 2 households** --whether indoors or outdoors.
- As I said before, face coverings will now be required in both **public and private settings** whenever you're with people outside of your household, even if you're socially distant.
- And while I beg all Nevadans to listen to our health experts and the CDC by only spending Thanksgiving with your household members, if you choose to gather with those you do not live with, you must all wear masks.
- **Additionally,** there will be a pause on adult and youth sports tournaments during this period.
- Retail establishments, including Indoor Malls, will not have to change their capacity during this Statewide Pause and can continue operating at 50%.

- Retail & grocery stores with over 50,000 sq. ft. capacity will now be required to have employees at all public entrances counting patrons to ensure compliance with capacity limits.
- Again, I want to strongly encourage and promote online ordering, curbside, delivery, and/or carry out operations.
- As a reminder, every business, venue & gathering space is required to post capacity limits under COVID-19 directives at all public entrances. You can find downloadable capacity signs on the NV Health Response website.

WHAT WON'T CHANGE UNDER STATEWIDE PAUSE:

- Brothels, adult entertainment establishments, day clubs and night clubs will remain closed.
- Again, retail establishments will not have to change their capacity limit of 50%, but some will have new mitigation requirements in place.

- Additionally, the following businesses can continue operating under the current standards and will not have to adhere to new restrictions under the Statewide Pause:
 - Hair Salons, Barbershops, Nail salons & Businesses that provide Aesthetic Skin Services
 - Spas, Massage Therapy & Massage Establishments
 - Body Art or Piercing Establishments
 - Finally, **Community and Recreational Centers** will continue to be able to operate at **50% capacity**, understanding they provide critical child care services during this time of need.
- I want to be clear that the new public gatherings limits do not apply to our schools districts in Nevada. And I want to take a few minutes to **talk about our schools.**
- The very first Emergency Directive I issued after declaring a State of Emergency back in March was to temporarily close schools. At that time, none of us could have imagined that we would have some children in our State who had not set foot in a school building for more than 8 months.

- Since I first made the difficult decision to close school buildings, we have seen our infection rates and risk factors increase and decrease in response to actions taken.
- That includes actions that government has taken in regards to issuing stay-at-home orders, closures and the gradual reopening of our economy.
- **But it also includes actions we have taken as individuals in response to whether or not all of us are doing everything we can to keep our neighbors and families safe.** Whether we wear our masks and refrain from taking unnecessary risks.
- Let's be honest: our casinos, hotels, restaurants, and bars are open with strict restrictions so that we can protect our economy. Meanwhile, the majority of school buildings across our State are closed and our kids are suffering as a result. Our education system and our economy are not mutually exclusive – they are tied together.
- **And as long as school buildings are closed, our economy can't be fully open.** Mom and Dad can't go to work if they have children learning from home who need supervision. We must reprioritize keeping our kids in the classroom or getting them there.

- Throughout this crisis, we have been talking about protecting our vulnerable populations. While children are not as physically vulnerable to COVID as the elderly or medically at-risk, that certainly doesn't mean that they are immune to its effects. They too are vulnerable in this pandemic, and **they desperately need all of our support.**
- As I said, we have students who have not been inside a school building in over 8 months.
- And while we are doing everything we can to provide community support, for some children, that could mean that they have not had access to reliable food, to safe shelter, or to caring adults who can intervene immediately if something isn't right in over 8 months.
- We've talked about wearing masks to protect our elderly parents and grandparents. And we've talked about staying home so we can keep our economy open.
- **Today, I am asking you to not only follow through with these tougher restrictions during the Statewide Pause for the vulnerable and our economy, but to do it because our children deserve our support.**

- We have seen more deaths by suicide among students this fall than in years prior, and it breaks my heart to share that victims have included students as young as 8 years old.
- We are in a pandemic, which caused an economic crisis, which has created a mental health crisis. And getting children back into school buildings is a key way that we can ensure they are getting the education and support they desperately need.
- **That's why we must do everything we can to help prevent the spread and that's part of why I am putting Nevada in a 3-week Statewide Pause with restrictions I just spoke about.**
- The restrictions I outlined tonight apply statewide- they are baseline standards for all our communities. But I would be remiss to not remind local governments of their ability to enact stronger measures – especially if your local public health officials are giving you recommendations, or if your hospitals become overwhelmed, or you experience outbreaks in your counties – **take action.**
- The measures I am announcing tonight – our statewide pause-- will be in effect for a three-week period.

- Throughout this pause, we will be evaluating our situation and looking for signs of concerns or improvement. We will monitor our transmission rate, the slope of the epi curve, and our percentage increase of cases. Depending on the trends, Nevadans can expect a few outcomes:
- If our percentage increase of cases begin to slow and our epi curve begins to plateau, we will make an evaluation of whether it's a consistent trend, or whether we need more time under these restrictions to ensure that the downward trajectory stays in place.
- Or, we may consider slowly loosening back to the restrictions currently in place. The numbers and the virus – as well as our individual and collective actions – determine the timeline.
- If this is not taken seriously and our situation worsens in the next three weeks – continuing the current trajectory that threatens our health care infrastructure -- I will be forced to intervene and to take stronger action.

- Stronger action will be targeted at high-risk settings, and may include:
 - Prohibition of indoor dining and service at restaurants and bars.
 - Closure of gyms and fitness facilities.
 - Severe restrictions on gathering sizes
 - That is what is in our future if our trends do not improve.
- As your Governor, I am confident that I did all I could to avoid further restrictions and keep us on the path forward, but now I must act.
- But I am hopeful that these restrictions announced today going into effect on Tuesday will help reduce our caseload. I don't want to impose further restrictions, but we are too close to the real solution, the vaccines, to give up now.
- I remain encouraged by the developments with the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines. **There is a light at the end of this tunnel, and we are getting closer. But we don't have a vaccine yet.**
- **There's not doubt that this surge is a global and national problem – but it's our problem as Nevadans to fix within our own State.**

- So in this moment, with these new restrictions and with that optimism on vaccine progress in mind: I'm asking all of Nevada's leaders - business, labor, religious, elected, associations, academic, and many others - to intensify your efforts even more, to educate, inform and model what is required of all of us to bridge to the vaccine, to fully reopen our lives and to propel Nevada forward, again.
- I implore you to tap into Nevada's independent spirit in this moment and consider your own personal responsibility. WE decide our distance to others. WE decide how long we spend in a high-risk setting. WE decide whether we are going to prioritize getting our kids into the classroom, allowing our businesses to operate by following responsible measures, and protecting our hospital system. If it doesn't feel safe, it isn't safe.
- Be determined, offer help and hope to others, believe in our future and know we are closer to the end than the beginning of this terrible pandemic.
- Thank you. I will now take some questions. I think some of my staff is on the Zoom call to help facilitate this process.

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