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Gov. Sisolak, Nevada Health Response team launch long-term response plan

CARSON CITY, NV — Today, Governor Steve Sisolak and the Nevada Health Response team unveiled a new long-term mitigation strategy for the State of Nevada to help provide predictability and stability moving forward.

The plan was developed recognizing the State of Nevada and the nation are still in response mode to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be for the foreseeable future. The virus is still infecting people and is likely to do so for the months ahead until a vaccine is developed.

"This is a natural evolution in the State's response, and one that recognizes the need for a deliberate and predictable response to the protracted crisis of a global pandemic," **said Gov. Sisolak.**

The State developed a sustainable, targeted response model, one that will allow Nevada to utilize all available state and county assets in this response and recovery effort, maximize consistency and accountability, and prioritize the communication of the state's most accurate data to the public and to decisionmakers.

A copy of the plan and other supporting documents are available online at nvhealthresponse.nv.gov.

A copy prepared remarks from Governor Sisolak and Caleb Cage are below:

Good evening. Thank you all for being here tonight.

I am again joined by Caleb Cage, the Nevada COVID-19 Response Director and Ms. Julia Peek, a deputy administrator in the Department of Health and Human Services. In this role, Ms. Peek is helping lead Nevada's statewide contact tracing efforts. I am pleased to have them both here with me.

As mentioned last week, we have learned a lot day-by-day about how best to analyze this data and tackle this disease, and in the last week, as I mentioned, the Nevada Health Response Team finalized a long term mitigation strategy for the state of Nevada to help us provide some predictability and stability moving forward.

Today, I am glad to have Caleb and Julia with me to help walk Nevadans through this plan

As mentioned last week, tonight, we are laying out a long term strategy for mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in Nevada through a targeted approach – all centered back to our original goal of making our response state managed and locally executed.

As we all know, the State of Nevada and our nation are still in response mode to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be for the foreseeable future. The virus is still infecting people and is likely to do so for the months ahead until a vaccine is developed.

To be successful, we have developed a sustainable, targeted response model, one that will allow us to utilize all available state and county assets in this response and recovery effort, maximize consistency and accountability, and

prioritize the communication of the state's most accurate data to the public and to decisionmakers.

This is a natural evolution in the state's response, and one that recognizes the need for a deliberate and predictable response to the protracted crisis of a global pandemic.

At the beginning of this pandemic response, we took bold moves to flatten the curve by issuing broad-based stay-at-home orders and closures -- and it worked – because outside of a vaccine, we know that decreasing interactions and mobility is a successful measure to mitigate the spread.

However, shutting down public and economic activity throughout the State is not sustainable in the long term. Hundreds of thousands lost their jobs, businesses suffered, and our fragile economy took a massive hit – leading to negative impacts felt from the State's budget all the way down to household budgets throughout Nevada.

But the good news is this: by switching to a strategic, targeted approach, we can protect the health and safety of Nevadans by mitigating the spread of disease at the root of where it is occurring, all while keeping our economy open and avoiding hurting the businesses that are doing their part.

This new approach will ensure the State, in coordination with each county, can assess all the data, and make timely decisions to address identified risk areas and take swift action.

In a moment, Caleb will walk through the details of this new strategic mitigation plan, but here's a quick summary: every week, using data, the

state will update the three Elevated Disease Transmission criteria for each county.

The COVID-19 response task force will then be able to review the criteria and see which counties are experiencing a decrease in risk, or an increased risk, meaning a county met two or more of these criteria for two or more consecutive weeks.

If a county is determined to have an increased risk based on the data, they will enter an assessment and review process with the state task force that could result in changing the county's mitigation level.

During that assessment, the Task Force and county will review all available data and statewide critical metrics to determine the root cause of the spread, and ultimately come up with an action plan to address it, which could lead to targeted measures such as:

Increased enforcement

Decrease in gathering size

Decrease in fire code capacity for certain businesses

And more.

As I mentioned, the Task Force will not only be looking at the data, but other critical areas that will help determine why a county is experiencing an increase in risk level. They will include the following:

Hospital Capacity

Access to Personal Protective Equipment

Testing Capacity

Case Investigation and Contact Tracing
Protection of Vulnerable Populations
Enforcement

Its through this review process that the county and State will be able to determine the most effective targeted approach to take to mitigate the spread in that area.

For example, if the assessment determines that an increase in positives in a county are all stemming from skilled nursing facilities, then it wouldn't make sense to close down indoor dining. The plan should be focused on stopping the spread at those nursing facilities.

In the case that there is not enough data or information needed to take a targeted approach in a county, or if a county is not collaborating with the State in a productive manner, the State will not hesitate to implement mitigation measures in accepted high risk settings, but I remain hopeful for broad collaboration with this new approach.

At this time, I will turn it over to Caleb to walk through the process in more depth

CALEB CAGE:

Thank you, Governor.

I would like to reiterate what you and others have said a number of times in recent weeks regarding the nature of our response. We are several months into this pandemic now, and we can be proud of the work we have done to

date. However, this virus is no less dangerous and present today than it was in March.

Because it is so serious, and because we have learned many important lessons and built important capacities, it is time for our response to change. To be clear, we are still responding to this emergency, and our response needs to be sustainable for the long-term.

As the Governor mentioned last week, this new approach will have updated criteria for the state and our county partners to be assessed by; mitigation levels that will allow for more predictability; increased enforcement for improved compliance; and targeted approaches in partnership with our counties. This new approach emphasizes communication, coordination, and collaboration.

Overall, what Nevadans need to know is this: the criteria determines a county's risk level and the risk level determines the mitigation level.

We will be using the same criteria previously announced, which includes looking at testing, case rates and positivity, but we will be looking at a slightly longer time frame for each of those criteria, to get a better idea of the spread of COVID in counties and to help normalize and stabilize the data. With the timeframe adjustments, the criteria now include:

Average number of tests per day (per 100,000) < 150 -- this is reported over a 14-day period with a 7-day lag

Case rate (per 100,000) > 200 – this is now completed by taking the total number of cases diagnosed and reported over a 30-day period divided by the number of people living in the county

Case rate (per 100,000) > 50 AND testing positivity > 7.0% -- this is reported over a 14-day period with a 7-day lag

Every Thursday, DHHS will run a report of the criteria to determine how Nevada's 17 counties are faring. Then, the task force, formed by Governor Sisolak, will reach out to county leaders to inform them of their status.

Counties that do not meet two or more of the criteria will remain at baseline status, maintaining compliance with all our Statewide directives.

Counties experiencing elevated risk will enter into an assessment process with the state COVID-19 response task force. We will look at previous weeks of data, contact tracing results, and other critical areas the Governor mentioned earlier – such as hospitalizations, community spread and enforcement.

Counties will be asked to create an action plan, which may include implementing certain mitigation levels beyond the statewide baseline, including potentially moving to 25 percent capacity in high-risk settings or reducing public gatherings to slow the spread.

The county's plans should be data-driven, and should outline their efforts to target the sources of infection and community spread.

Once the plan is approved by the task force, counties will be responsible for implementing the plan.

Again, if there is not enough reliable data to take a targeted approach in a county, or if a county is not collaborating with the State in a productive

manner, the Task Force and/or the Governor maintain the right to take action and implement across-the-board mitigation measures in certain high risk settings.

That may include, in areas of increased spread, lowering capacity across the board in businesses or potentially returning to Phase 1 recommendations, which may including restricting high-risk businesses to curbside and delivery only services or further reductions of public gatherings.

The State will continue to provide support where necessary, and as the Governor mentioned the State will not hesitate to implement mitigation measures in high risk settings, but I remain hopeful for broad collaboration with this new approach.

The State will undertake a similar thoughtful and collaborative approach to ease up restrictions if county data shows improvement.

We know that this is an important undertaking for Nevada. Our counties and communities are unique and this approach helps provide targeted interventions to communities while recognizing that the virus is creating different risks in each of our counties.

This partnership will help ensure the State and counties are communicating and collaborating in a coordinated effort to protect all Nevadans.

At this time, I will turn it back over to Governor Sisolak.

GOVERNOR SISOLAK:

Thank you, Caleb. I want to be clear: in no way are we relaxing our mitigation efforts – we are taking a more strategic, aggressive approach that will target this disease where it is spreading and take action to stop it.

And until the first assessment takes place and action plans are finalized between the counties and the task force the current restrictions for bars, pubs and taverns will remain in place for the four counties previously identified as meeting increased transmission risk criteria.

Just as before, this plan, or any other, will not work if we don't have full participation from all Nevadans – every county, municipality, business, employee, neighbor, and family.

If Nevadans continue to wear face coverings as we're all mandated to do, along with practicing aggressive social distancing, this targeted approach should work and will allow more sectors of our economy to remain open.

If Nevadans begin to relax their efforts and take this less seriously, this targeted approach will not work, and will lead our state backward which could ultimately lead once again to broad-based closures and limitations. I don't want that, and neither do all of you.

We can do both: we can mitigate the spread and avoid harming businesses that are doing their part, but only if we all commit to it. I implore you to remain as vigilant as ever.

Make no mistake Nevada, we are in a very precarious position. I promise you, I will give you all I have: my energy, resources, my focus and my best efforts, to continue to walk this tightrope between your personal health and your financial sustainability, but to get this done... I need you to give me all you have, too.

Thank you, we will now take some questions.

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