



# Pettis County

## HEALTH CENTER

### **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding COVID-19**

We are receiving many questions by phone and through Facebook. Here are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions. We will continue to update this information as new questions are received.

**1. Why is Pettis County not opening everything on May 4? The Governor says we can.**

The information from the Governor is officially published through a Public Health Order signed by Dr. Randall Williams who is the Director of the Department of Health and Senior Services. The order permits local public health authorities to provide orders that are more restrictive, but not less. In Pettis County, our cases have been increasing for 2 weeks – doubling in the past week. Therefore, we must move more slowly to re-open.

**2. Who is the County Health Officer and what gives that person the right to restrict what we can do?**

The County Health Officer is the Administrator of the Pettis County Health Center and is appointed by the County Commission. In the State of Missouri, both the statutes (laws) and regulations give the County Health Officer the responsibility and authority to protect the county from communicable diseases. The statutes covering this issue are in Chapter 192, specifically RsMo 192.020 and 19 CSR 20-20.040. In Missouri the authority to restrict activities in a communicable disease emergency as declared by the Governor rests with the Director of the Department of Health and Senior Services for the state and the County Health Officer for the county.

**3. What should people do to protect themselves from the virus?**

Stay at home when possible, do not participate in activities that bring people together such as family dinners, parties, housewarming events or other places where people gather, wash your hands frequently for 20 seconds and use hand sanitizer, stay home if you are sick, cover your cough and sneeze in your elbow, clean and sanitize the surfaces you touch, clean your hands when you have been out of your home and don't visit people who are at risk

**4. What is the story about mask? Why should I wear a mask in public?**

For the general public, masks protect those around you. The number of people who have tested positive for the virus without symptoms is growing. If you have the virus and cough, sneeze, sing or speak forcefully, you are sending virus particles into the air that spread the virus to others. By wearing a mask, those virus particles are trapped. Cloth masks are fine, but should be washed daily. Any filter that absorbs moisture can be used in those masks that have

a pocket. If everyone wore a mask while in public, there would be many fewer places where people can be exposed.

#### **5. When can I go back to church?**

Under the County Public Health order churches may reopen on May 4<sup>th</sup> but with limitations. There are restrictions on the number of people who can be in the building based on the size of the worship space and those who attend services must remain 6 foot apart. Six foot apart means a circle all around - front, sides and back. During a meeting with pastors, additional guidance was provided to include having members of the congregation use hand sanitizer upon entry, wear masks, having ushers seat members of the congregation and dismiss the congregation in a manner to reduce people grouping together, no common touch items such as collection baskets, hymnals, prayer books or communion trays, extra cleaning and sanitizing between services to include pews, restrooms and doors, and propping doors open during service to avoid touching the door. Singing can spread the virus as coughing and sneezing so singing should be limited. Continuing on line or other electronic means to provide services is encouraged. Some pastors have determined that the plans in place can meet the needs of their congregation and others have determined to wait a while longer. At risk members of the congregation should carefully consider if attending in person services is best for them.

#### **6. When can stores reopen?**

Based on the County Public Health order that goes into effect on May 4, retail facilities may reopen with limits on the number of people who may be in the store. For spaces over 10,000 sq ft the occupancy is 10% and under 10,000 sq ft the occupancy is 25%. For public spaces without an occupancy statement, the formula is 1 person per 30 sq feet. There continues to be the requirement for 6 foot spacing all around among store patrons. The retailer is responsible for monitoring and limiting the number of people in the space as well as extra cleaning of common touch spaces and making sure that those waiting in line maintain the 6 foot spacing. Businesses had the ability to remain open, but some businesses were restricted to 10 or less people in the space. Businesses will determine when they are able to open. Each business needs to identify how the business will meet the requirements of the Public Health Order to protect both customers and staff. Businesses should not be judged on when they open, but rather how they are able to meet the guidance to open safely. Some retailers are directed by corporate policies regarding re-opening.

#### **7. When can restaurants open for dining in?**

Any food establishment that is required to have a Food Permit is required to submit a plan to the Pettis County Health Center outlining how the facility will keep patrons and staff safe and limit the risk of spread of the virus. When those plans are approved and the case count decreases, in person dining will be permitted. When in person dining starts back again, there will be limits on the number of people allowed in the restaurant. Health Center Environmental Health staff has been communicating with food establishments.

**8. When can I get a hair cut, go to my stylist, get my nails done, get a new tattoo?**

All of these businesses have been given guidelines that need to be met to re-open. For those businesses that have reported they can meet the requirements, they will be able to open on May 6.

**9. I think I have been exposed to the virus or I am feeling sick. Where can I get tested?**

Pettis County is fortunate that the number of tests available has increased to the point that anyone needing to be tested can be tested. Testing is available through Bothwell Regional Health Center by calling the hospital at 660-826-8833 and asking for the COVID-19 hotline or contacting Katy Trail Community Health at 877-733-5824. Testing is available for those without insurance or a primary care provider. Call before going to any clinic if you think you have symptoms of COVID-19.

**10. What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

The most common symptoms are fever of 100.4, cough and shortness of breath. New symptoms have been added to include chills, chills with shaking, headache, muscle aches, sore throat and new loss of the sense of taste or smell.

**11. The Governor says the state is opening up on May 4. Why can't I go visit my loved one in the nursing home or assisted living?**

Our facilities for our most vulnerable population are working very hard to keep everyone safe. As has happened in other places, COVID-19 in a nursing home can have deadly results. Both the state and county public health orders forbid anyone from entering a long term care facility, assisted living facility or other facility caring for at risk individuals except to provide essential services or end of life situations. Everyone understands how difficult this is for families and residents, but it is absolutely necessary to protect the most vulnerable among us. There is no information about when families will be able to visit again.

**12. What about outdoor activities?**

Going for a walk keeping distant from those who do not live in your house is good exercise. The parks are opening up slowly, but caution needs to be used when going to events in the parks. There is still the need to maintain social distancing of 6 feet and make sure that surfaces that are touched are clean. Activities such as auctions and yard sales still need to maintain the 6 feet distance. If cases are identified as happening due to these events, the organizers will be notified. You can visit your neighbors as long as you stay 6 feet apart. Driveway visits can be a great relief as you can sit 6 feet apart. You can go for a drive in your car as long it is with people who live in your house.

**13. What about funerals, weddings and other types of gatherings?**

Unfortunately, funerals, wedding and parties have been the place where the virus has spread and caused serious illness and in some cases death. Any of these events require participants to be separated by 6 feet all around and the limit on the number of people allowed in a building is restricted. Again, if there are cases identified from these types of events, the organizer will be notified that a person with the virus attended the event.

**14. I have been told I am a close contact to a positive case. Why do I have to stay home and not go out in public for 14 days?**

Quarantine is the term for people who have been exposed but are not sick but required to stay home. Isolation is the term for people who are sick stay but required to stay home. What experts tell us is that people can spread the disease from 2 days before they become sick to 14 days after they become sick. The length of quarantine is 14 days from the last contact with a positive case. This period of time is to help stop the spread of the disease, particularly among those who may not have symptoms. Failure to stay home during isolation or quarantine is against the law.

**15. Why don't you post how many people have recovered?**

Right now there is not a standard definition for recovered except that the person is alive 30 days after being diagnosed with COVID-19. Rather, we report the number of people released from quarantine or isolation.

**16. Why don't you release where people work when they test positive?**

When a person tests positive, we ask that they contact their employer so that we can do contact tracing within the work environment. Employers have been provided information on how to handle a positive employee in the work place. We try very hard not to release the information about a positive case that would allow that person to be identified. We believe that no one would want identifying information released about them. We are required to protect the personal and health information of those we are following.

**17. I have heard about contact tracing. What does that mean and is that happening in Pettis County?**

When a report of a positive case is received by the Health Center, we contact the person and ask where they have been since 2 days before they became sick, who lives in their house and who they have been in contact with since 2 days before they became sick. A close contact is a person who has been within 6 feet of the positive case for more than 15-30 minutes without a mask or other type of barrier. This includes people at work, family and friends. Then all the people who fit that category are called and placed into quarantine. The staff from the Health Center checks on everyone in quarantine and positive cases on a regular basis. We ask each person to check their temperature twice a day and let us know if they are developing any symptoms. Contact tracing and monitoring has happened since the first case.

**18. There is so much information out there on Facebook and other social media. Not all of the information agrees. Where do I find out what is really true?**

The Pettis County Health Center website and Facebook page are a reliable source of information. The website is [www.pettiscountyhealthcenter.com](http://www.pettiscountyhealthcenter.com) The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services at [www.health.mo.gov](http://www.health.mo.gov) has good information as well as the CDC. There can be different numbers for how many cases there are in the county. This can happen based upon how positive cases are posted. The Health Center posts an update on the number of cases each day M-F at 4 pm on our Facebook page and updates other statistics such as the

number of tests, contacts and those released from isolation/quarantine are posted weekly on our website.

**19. I am supposed to go back to my place of employment. Is it safe? Do I have to go back if I do not feel safe?**

Employers want to have a safe environment that limits the risk to employees and customers. If an employer has a positive case and there are a number of close contacts, this can impact the employer's ability to function. This has already happened in a business causing that business to close until the employees complete quarantine. There were not enough employees left to operate. If you have a concern about returning to your place of employment, you need to talk to your employer about your concerns. The Governor has stated that if you are offered work and you do not return this will impact your ability to collect unemployment. There are exceptions to this statement, but you will need to consult the human resources person for your employer.

**20. When this started I saw lots of cleaning going on. Now I don't see as much cleaning of carts or other places. Is this OK?**

The need for cleaning is still there and very important. The longer this goes on, the more tired everyone becomes of the routine and the easier it is to forget. Now is not the time to stop cleaning. Having wipes available for when you go out to clean the surfaces you touch is another protection for you. Be sure to wash your hands as soon as you can after being out in public.

**21. When is this going to end?**

We all wish we had an answer. The current public health order is through May 31. The situation will be re-evaluated toward the end of May and new information sent out. The idea of social distancing will continue until we have a vaccine or rapid testing easily available. Until that time, everyone is asked to do their part to keep themselves and other as safe as possible.