



Public Health Brief

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Wanted: Dead or Alive

In what has been called “the 2nd inning” of the COVID-19 pandemic, what is our goal? Is it no deaths with a dead economy, or a robust economy with many deaths? Actually - neither. How do we achieve a balance – minimizing the number of deaths while minimizing the impact on the economy. Certainly there is lots of tension between the public health, socioeconomic, and political points of view as to how we get there. The bottom line is that our highest priority needs to be the protection of persons at highest risk for serious illness and death, while preserving the functioning of our healthcare system and ensuring the mental and economic health of all.

We are at a crucial juncture, with lots of pressure to get everything back to normal as quickly as possible. Let's be honest – there will not be a return to “normal”, at least in my lifetime. There will be a “new normal”, with COVID-19 vying for our attention along with flu and all the other major causes of illness, injury, and death, along with lots of social distancing for months if not years to come.

How do we carefully get to where we want to be – based on science and data? How and what are we doing?

Governor Newsom has identified 6 indicators to measure progress:

1. testing – In Alpine County, we currently have the capacity to test anyone who has symptoms or has a link to someone who does. A shortage of swabs is being addressed, and the Governor has developed a plan to set up testing sites in “rural testing deserts” within 60 minutes of everyone, with implementation beginning next week. In California, there still needs to be an increase in testing capacity from the current 16,000 per day to >50,000 tests per day.



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case finding, contact tracing, quarantine, and isolation – Alpine County currently has sufficient staff to perform these functions, with additional just-in-time training. This would include personal in HHS, and other county employees who are all designated as Disaster Service Workers.

2. protecting high risk persons – We have emphasized physical distancing, and the support of persons needing food, transportation to pharmacies or grocery stores, and mental or behavioral health support. Current guidance is provided frequently through various channels.

3. healthcare system - Our Alpine County Clinic and local hospitals have not yet experienced the surge that they have anticipated. We are prepared for the eventual increase in illness in our communities.

4. Many trials are underway for treatment options and vaccines, with updates frequently.

5. supporting physical distancing - Schools and child-care facilities are closed. We have issued guidance to essential businesses to protect staff and the public.

6. The last of the Governor's indicators is the ability to determine when to reinstitute certain measures such as closures. A number of experts and taskforces are developing triggers and guidelines.

What has been learned in the last few days?

1. Blood tests are showing that more people have previously been infected, many times more than previously thought.
2. The number of people with new infections is beginning to slow, in some places more than others.
3. Although some “hot zones” have been seriously impacted, the healthcare system did not collapse under the weight of the stress.
4. Rural communities with lower population densities and a stay-at-home lifestyle have not experienced high levels of infection. However, our healthcare systems are smaller and more isolated, and we have a higher proportion of elderly and persons with chronic medical conditions. Although I would love to fantasize that we will never have peaks of illness, I would be lying to myself – and you.

So what does all this mean for us in Alpine County?

We are still at risk, and the biggest factor is TRAVEL. Either residents go somewhere and bring it back, or we invite visitors into the county to bring their dollars – and their virus! – with them. No one likes living under lockdown, and that is not sustainable. We need to move toward a gradual easing of



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the “do nots” with great caution. That means physical distancing, face coverings when unable to maintain adequate space, and compulsive hand hygiene.

The fishing season opener has been delayed until as late as May 31st. Until the Governor modifies his “Stay-at-Home” order, we will not consider opening up motels, hotels, short-term rentals, or camping. Travel out of your home area is a violation of the Governor’s order. We are working with the Ranger at Grover Hot Springs on conditions for opening the pool.

County staff will be allowed to come back to their worksites on May 4th, but county facilities will not be open to the public for at least a few more weeks after that. You may access all essential county functions either by phone or electronically. For the Library, contact them for details. Dial-A-Ride is fully functional. HHS staff is available to provide food as requested. The Clinic is open. Testing for COVID-19 is available.

We encourage you to fill out your Census form on-line. When able to return to work, census workers may come knocking at your door!

All large group activities (music festivals, bike races, etc.) have been cancelled for the summer. Conversations are underway regarding organized summer camps and day camps. Any requests for permits from Community Development or Environmental Health (EH), or rental of county facilities will require mitigation plans approved by the EH Director, the Public Health Officer, the Community Development Director, and the Office of Emergency Services (the Sheriff) prior to approval.

Restaurants may be open for take-out only with modifications to protect staff and the public.

We welcome input and questions and will be re-evaluating the situation constantly. Our goal is to keep you and our community healthy as much as we can within our control. Remember that much of the success of these efforts is up to you the citizen in looking out for the health of you and your household and community. We can only succeed if we do this together!

For up-to-date information, go to:

<https://www.alpinecountyca.gov/index.aspx?NID=430>

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/ncov2019.aspx>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Automated texting for COVID-19 information is active in Alpine County. Text "covid19" "covid" "coronavirus" or "corona" to 211-211.

Warm Line: 530-694-1011



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