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## For Immediate Release

# Elbert County Board of Health Issues Guidance for Reopening Businesses and Reengaging in Public Life

Guidance follows lifting of statewide stay-at-home order on April 26

**Kiowa, CO, April 21, 2020:** Elbert County's efforts to "flatten the curve" – to reduce the potential of overwhelming our regional and state medical treatment capacity by slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our communities – has been largely successful.

Though great risk still exists, especially to certain segments of our population, coordinated efforts are underway to resume a measured level of daily activities. The Board of Health is attempting to balance protections for public health, protections of personal liberties, the needs of our local economy and the financial welfare of residents.

Our state and national leadership have announced plans for reopening, and as your County Board of Health, we want you to be prepared for the incremental changes that are coming in the weeks ahead.

We remain proud of our Elbert County residents. Together, we have faced these challenging times with calm resolve and responsible behavior, which has helped keep the number of COVID-19 cases in the County low when compared to neighboring counties. In part, this is thanks to our rural landscape and low population density, but it's also a result of the good decisions of our population – an expression of our rural values. As County Commissioners, we trust our neighbors to do the right thing, and we are focused on providing accurate information that allows residents to evaluate their own risks and determine the appropriate actions to take for themselves.

The current statewide Stay At Home Executive Order will expire on Sunday, April 26, 2020. On Monday, April 27, 2020, while we remain "safer at home," we will no longer be restricted in our movements, and some businesses will reopen. Following is general guidance on how to continue to protect yourself, your family, and our community in the weeks ahead. We will provide additional guidance as the situation changes.

### **What changes for individuals?**

1. The statewide "stay at home" order is lifted at the end of the day on April 26. It remains safer to remain at home if you can, but you will no longer be compelled to do so by the Governor's executive order.
2. We encourage all residents to continue to practice appropriate social distancing behaviors, wear face coverings, and limit gatherings to no more than 10 people. These precautions

will help slow the spread of infection, protect yourself and your family, and reduce risk to your friends and neighbors.

3. We strongly recommend that people over the age of 60, especially those with underlying health conditions, continue to stay at home and limit physical contact as much as possible. Currently, nearly 90% of the deaths attributed to COVID-19 in Colorado are of people who were over 60. People over 80 are particularly vulnerable and comprise over 50% of the deaths that have occurred.
4. For specific health guidance, contact your primary care provider. For general guidance on how to reduce your personal risks and help keep your family and neighbors safe, see the "COVID-19 Information" page on the County's website at [https://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/public\\_health\\_and\\_environment\\_-\\_covid\\_19.php](https://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/public_health_and_environment_-_covid_19.php).
5. If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and choose to contribute your experience to a state public health database, we encourage you to report your symptoms using the online "Symptom Checker" on the state of Colorado's COVID page at <https://covid19.colorado.gov/>. The information you provide will help state and local public health officials to better track the epidemic and respond to outbreaks accordingly.

### **What changes for businesses?**

1. Most small businesses may reopen on Monday, April 27. Businesses that serve walk-in customers may reopen and should adopt recommended social distancing and face covering practices.
2. Businesses whose personnel interact in close proximity to customers, such as dentists, salons, and chiropractors, will receive guidance from their state licensing agencies regarding what restrictions apply to their businesses, but many may reopen on April 27, as long as they adopt recommended social distancing and face covering practices.
3. Professional services that involve home visits (for example, real estate showings, financial services, or legal advice) may resume on May 1, and should adopt recommended social distancing and face covering practices.
4. **Dine in restaurants will not immediately resume operations.** The Governor has set a target date of May 15 to begin phasing in the reopening of dining areas and bars. If we do not see a spike in new cases in the weeks after May 15, there may continue to be more services available, eventually including regular in-house dining.
5. Large businesses (few of which operate in Elbert County) may reopen, and we strongly encourage them to continue to support telecommuting and/or multiple shifts where possible, with the goal of allowing for 50% or fewer employees to be on premises at any given time.
6. If you have questions regarding specific measures to safeguard yourself, your employees and customers, or you are unsure how the guidance above affects your business, please contact our Elbert County Public Health at [publichealth@elbertcounty-co.gov](mailto:publichealth@elbertcounty-co.gov)

### **What changes for employees?**

1. Contact your employer to find out what practices your workplace will follow. We expect furloughs to continue for a time as businesses ramp back up. State and federal benefits will continue to be available.

2. Remember that most Elbert County residents who work outside the home commute to jobs in other counties that may impose different restrictions that could affect your work site.
3. Since it appears from public health data that most cases of COVID-19 in Elbert County were contracted elsewhere, we recommend you do not stop at local businesses on your way home from work. Please consider showering and changing at home before venturing out to support our local economy.

### **What changes for public services?**

1. Most County services will continue to be provided remotely for the next several weeks. County staff are currently installing “sneeze guard” barriers and other measures designed to protect citizens and employees. We expect that limited in-person services will be available by appointment starting Monday, April 27, and as conditions allow, we will begin to reopen County facilities.
2. Our Fairgrounds amenities, such as the Exhibit and Agriculture Buildings, will remain unavailable for event rentals. We don’t yet know how large gatherings will be phased in, and these building are designated as alternate sites for County operations, should they be needed.
3. Fairgrounds campsite rentals remain available only for personnel engaged in local critical business activities. Business is conducted online and via a drop box.
4. Schools will stay closed for the remainder of the school year. Additional guidance will be forthcoming prior to the start of the fall semester. Specific questions should be directed to individual school districts.
5. The towns of Elizabeth, Simla and Kiowa may provide their own guidance for their residents. The County continues to support towns and special districts as requested to develop procedures for returning to more routine operations.

### **What are the County’s public health priorities?**

1. Continued provision of science-based and data-driven recommendations and guidance to citizens, businesses, and other local governments and agencies regarding best practices for limiting further spread of the COVID-19 virus in our communities.
2. Collaboration with state agencies and local healthcare facilities to increase opportunities for COVID-19 testing to further inform local decision-making.
3. Continued coordination of resources and response capabilities with the Elbert County Office of Emergency Management.
4. Continued monitoring of acute care availability and resources in neighboring counties for citizens that require hospitalization as a result of a COVID-19 infection.
5. Expansion of contact tracing and interviews with those who report symptoms or test positive in order to track and identify localized outbreaks and general impacts of COVID-19 throughout the County.
6. Provision of regular updates and evidence-based recommendations to the Board of Health, consisting of our Board of County Commissioners, regarding changes to local guidance to our residents and businesses.

As time goes by and we gain more insight into the course of this pandemic and its impacts on our county, its communities, neighborhoods, and businesses, we will adjust and refine this guidance. Please direct comments and questions to [PublicHealth@ElbertCounty-CO.gov](mailto:PublicHealth@ElbertCounty-CO.gov). Thank you for your commitment to keeping Elbert County residents and families healthy and safe.

Elbert County Board of Health

Chris Richardson, Commissioner, District 1

Rick Pettitt, Commissioner, District 2

Grant Thayer, Commissioner, District 3

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