

March 16, 2020

Media Release:

Buncombe County Issues Further Guidance on Social Distancing Measures for Businesses and Community Members

It will take all of us working together to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Buncombe County. To prevent community members from congregating in close contact scenarios, measures that increase social distancing are important to implement now. Research shows that communities that aggressively employ layered social distancing measures are likely to achieve better outcomes than communities that rolled out delayed interventions.

CDC recommended on Sunday, March 15 that no mass gatherings with 50 people or more be held in the US for the next 8 weeks. This includes funerals, weddings, gyms, festivals, parades, concerts, spas, sporting events, or conferences.

Social Distancing is a specific strategy, proven by data to severely lessen the impact of high consequence pathogens. Social distancing reduces close contact. Close contact is defined as contact within six feet of someone for a 10 minute duration. Social distancing will be a critical step in slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

Events of any size should only be continued if they can be carried out with adherence to guidelines for protecting [vulnerable populations](#), [hand hygiene](#), and [social distancing](#). When feasible, organizers should modify events to be virtual.

The ban on gatherings does not include airports, bus and train stations, medical facilities, libraries, and spaces where people may be in transit and does not apply to grocery stores and pharmacies. Retail outlets are advised to reduce occupancy to provide adequate space for social distancing. Options for those business who must remain open include limiting hours and reducing capacity.

While we are not currently mandating that restaurants and bars close, we are strongly encouraging that operators eliminate dining room congregate meals and to operate pick-up and delivery services only. Again, this is to increase social distancing and to prevent community members from congregating in those close contact scenarios.

Buncombe County Public Health also advises that employees stay home if they are sick. It is critically important to ensure regular and good hand hygiene and increased focus on cleaning and disinfecting high touch surfaces.

Thank you for being partners and allies as we work together during this unprecedented, and rapidly evolving situation.

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