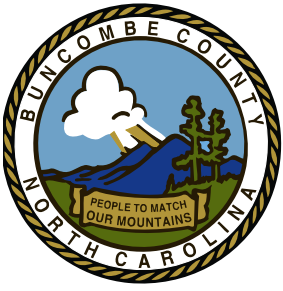


SAFE. SMART. STEP-BY-STEP

PHASED PLAN FOR REOPENING BUNCOMBE COUNTY



BUNCOMBE COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA



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COMMUNITY THANKS

All phases of Buncombe County's reopening will rely heavily on testing, contact tracing, and scientific metrics so we can constantly stay informed on how COVID-19 is spreading in our community. Buncombe County will also be working with community partners to provide face coverings to the public so that we can protect one another. Speaking of partnerships, we would like to thank the following organizations for resources, insights, and dedication to our cause of preventing the spread of disease:

- City of Asheville
- Biltmore Forest
- Black Mountain
- Montreat
- Weaverville
- Woodfin
- Buncombe County Sheriff's Office
- Asheville City Schools
- Buncombe County Schools
- Buncombe County Rescue Squad
- Mission Health
- Charles George VA Medical Center
- Health Care Providers
- United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County
- Hearts with Hands
- Beloved Asheville
- Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce
- Dogwood Health Trust
- WNC Community Health Services
- Mountain Area Health Education Center
- Buncombe County Unincorporated Fire Districts



MANAGERMESSAGE

On March 12, Buncombe County declared a state of emergency in accordance with advice from scientific and medical experts about the potential danger of the COVID-19 pandemic. This proactive action allowed the County to start to aggressively plan mitigation strategies to minimize the risk of community spread. Accordingly, we hoped to reduce the known unfortunate impacts of this global pandemic on residents, response and hospital resources, and our local economy. Furthermore, it was an intentional strategy aimed at having our County in a strong position to begin transitioning to reopening efforts when it was safe to do so.

The decision to roll out our first phase of reopening is informed by our experts in the health and emergency services fields who understand we are balancing economic disruption and public health. Buncombe County's relatively low case count and slowed curve show favorable trends that give us cautious optimism. As we move toward methodically and incrementally loosening some of our existing restrictions, we must allow science and reason to continue to govern our actions as expanding retail, recreational, religious, and other opportunities coincide with responsible stewardship of those actions. Until immunity is developed and a vaccine is widely accessible, mitigation remains our primary defense against the increased spread of COVID-19 that could force us back to stricter policies. Our health officials urge everyone to wear face coverings (masks) in public, maintain physical distancing, only make necessary trips, wash your hands, stay home when you're sick, and adhere to other CDC guidelines. We have all sacrificed, innovated, acclimated, hoped, prayed, and banded together to get to this point; let us be diligent in maintaining this positive position.

I cannot express enough gratitude for our first responders, public health staff, County employees, and everyone else coordinating a community-driven response. And finally, I want to thank you for your past efforts, continued sacrifices, and future understanding. Make no mistake, this is not a return to normalcy, and we are far from being out of the woods. But with science-based intentionality, we can manage our need to loosen restrictions and gradually ramp up economic activity while responsibly safeguarding the health of our community.

With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Avril Pinder". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Avril" written in a larger, more stylized script than the last name "Pinder".

Buncombe County Manager Avril Pinder



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The first priority in reopening is maintaining the health and safety of all residents of Buncombe County. Every measure taken by state and local governments, businesses, and individuals should consider the general health and safety of the public.



PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY

Despite the progress we have made and our relatively low case count in Buncombe County, COVID-19 is still a highly contagious virus, and we are still in the midst of a global pandemic. It takes all of us working together, following public health guidance, to safeguard our communities. Buncombe County's public health guidance continues to be driven by data, science, and fact.



PROTECTION OF THE VULNERABLE

COVID-19 may impact members of the community differently. We are committed to limiting spread of this disease and its related impacts among all of our neighbors, especially for those who are our most vulnerable.



ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Human health and economic stability are tightly linked. We prioritize human life in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand that continued, severe economic hardship undermines the health of the community as much as disease.



HEALTH CARE SYSTEM READINESS

Return to normal operations through a prudent approach that ensure available capacity to treat COVID-19 patients in the event of a medical surge. Health systems need to develop models for sustainability of medical supplies and preservation of medical resources without the need for public augmentation of medical supplies.



PROTECTION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES & MAINTAINING INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

Must not impair the fundamental rights of residents, and when restrictive measures are imposed they should be the least restrictive measures feasible to accomplish a specific medically necessary objective.

In the course of preserving public health and safety, the individual right to personal freedom and privacy must be respected. Any potential restrictions on individuals' movement or private information requires community engagement and must involve the least restrictive means to achieve a mutually desired goal.



PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

The plan to reopen must be rooted in sound medical judgement and driven by health metrics so that every resident feels safe as they return to work and their daily activities. Effective communication strategy is critical to ensuring public confidence during COVID-19 mitigation strategies

The best recommendations are those that are informed by data, science, and facts. Recommendations for community practices should be grounded in public health literature and research. They should be responsive to newly emerging scientific information and local health and economic indicators.



EQUITY

Prioritize the needs of those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic by focusing response and recovery efforts in low-income communities, communities of color (Latinx/Hispanic, Black/African American, Indigenous and Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, etc.), and LGBTQIA+ communities. This is an intersectional strategy that ensures that all who are highest risk are reached, including people with disabilities, the medically vulnerable, low-wage frontline workers, imprisoned individuals, housing insecure individuals, seniors, and many others.



COVID-19 RESPONSE

Following Governor Roy Cooper's March 10 executive order declaring a State of Emergency, Chairman Brownie Newman enacted a companion order for Buncombe County on March 12. Under the direction of the County Manager, Interim Public Health Director, and Emergency Services Director, the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated immediately following the County's order.

County Response to Covid-19 Public Health Crisis

Initial goals and strategies included:

- 1.** Protect residents of Buncombe County through effective public health, emergency services, and governmental management.
- 2.** Develop plans to mitigate community spread of the virus.
- 3.** Manage and enhance communication and information through one central contact by establishing a Joint Information Center (JIC).
- 4.** Identify at-risk populations and initiate working groups to anticipate needed medical and resource support for these community members.
- 5.** Open and expand channels of communication to partners
- 6.** Identify and evaluate current and future trigger points that may escalate emergency response
- 7.** Identify and evaluate available resources to support healthcare providers, first responders, essential workers, and community partners
- 8.** Develop modified operational plans in anticipation of a reduced workforce
- 9.** Develop nutrition and food distribution plan for community
- 10.** Identify and evaluate future trigger points that indicate that it may be safe to start reopening Buncombe County

MARCH 8-14

- Governor signs executive order declaring State of Emergency
- Governor suspends public school attendance
- Board Chairman signs executive order declaring Buncombe County's - State of Emergency
- Buncombe County establishes Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
- Buncombe County establishes Joint Information Center to formalize response & recovery
- COVID-19 Weekly Community Updates established

MARCH 22-31

- Chairman Newman signs Stay Home - Stay Safe order
- 4 Covid-19 cases confirmed in Buncombe County
- Evidence of community spread confirmed
- One Buncombe Relief Fund launched

APRIL 5-11

- Second COVID-19 Buncombe County fatality
- Board Chairman signs revised, expanded Stay Safe, Stay Home order
- One Buncombe Fund reaches nearly \$950K in donated funds
- Ready Team Call Center launches to field community questions
- Harrah's Cherokee Center serves as a shelter for healthy unhoused populations

APRIL 19-25

- Quick Response Teams (QRTs) established to treat non-life-threatening conditions and lower burden on local healthcare system
- EOC receives large supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) from state and local sources.
- Governor outlines a roadmap to reopening NC
- Adaptive response plan develops to slowly ease County restrictions, reopen businesses, and public spaces

MAY 3-9

- Governor moves forward with plans to implement Phase 1 of NC reopening on May 9
- Community Testing Plan ramps up
- EOC demobilization planning begins
- Board Chairman signs new Stay Home - Stay Safe declaration aligning BC with Governor's Executive Order No. 138

TIMELINE OF ACTIONS

MARCH 15-21

- EOC is activated
- Buncombe County implements first local restrictions
- Scheduled media briefings commence
- Workgroups assess support needed by at-risk populations: aging, unhoused, persons with behavioral health, domestic violence, food security, and childcare concerns

APRIL 1-4

- First COVID-19 Buncombe County fatality
- Buncombe County, United Way, and Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce form a partnership to match in-kind donations and volunteers with community organizations
- Coordinate with hospitals to assess capabilities and preparedness
- Finalize Facility Outbreak Plan of long-term care
- Finalize Detention Outbreak Plan

APRIL 12-18

- Third COVID-19 Buncombe County fatality
- Establish EOC Rapid Response & Recovery Equity Action Team
- Availability of Covid-19 testing increases
- Contact tracing plan defined, staff increases
- Pandemic planning finalized for Detention Center and vulnerable population outbreaks
- Assessment of economic conditions continues

APRIL 26- MAY 2

- Fourth COVID-19 Buncombe County fatality
- Buncombe County and NC State launch the COVID-19 Self Checker
- CDC updates symptom guidance
- Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce hosts 11 business community town hall meetings

MAY 10-16

- Phase 1 businesses open
- Interim Public Health Director encourages community to continue best practices that control spread of virus
- Week 1 of community testing for underresourced communities began
- Planning begins for COVID-19 Town Halls

WHAT PHASE 1 MEANS FOR BUNCOMBE COUNTY

On Friday, May 8 at 5 p.m., **Buncombe County** moved into Phase 1 of reopening. The *Stay at Home* order remains in place, but with fewer restrictions. The following chart will help you navigate what Phase 1 looks like for **Buncombe County**:

STAY HOME
STAY SAFE 

People should still stay at home as much as possible, but the variety of reasons people are allowed to leave their homes has expanded.

If you do leave home, **know the Ws...**



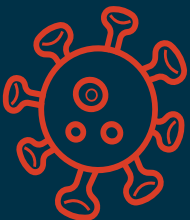
Wear a cloth face covering



Wait 6 feet apart. Avoid close contact.



Wash your hands often, or use hand sanitizer.



Despite the progress we have made and our relatively low case count in Buncombe County, COVID-19 is still a highly contagious virus, and we are still in the midst of a global pandemic. It takes all of us working together, following public health guidance, to safeguard our communities. Buncombe County's response continues to be driven by data, science, and fact.

Let's be **Safe**, Let's be **Smart**, Let's take this **Step by Step**.

TRANSITION TO PHASE 1

WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

Mitigation Measures	Guidance Through May 8	Phase 1 Guidance
Physical Distancing	Maintain 6 Ft. Apart. Avoid Close Contact	Maintain 6 Ft. Apart. Avoid Close Contact
Mass Gatherings	10 Person Limit	10 Person Limit
Local Travel	Essential Travel Only	For Commerce And Expanded Business
Face Coverings	Encouraged	Strongly Encouraged
Stay At Home Order	In Effect	In Effect, With Fewer Restrictions
High Risk Individuals	Reduce Exposure As Much As Possible	Reduce Exposure As Much As Possible

Activity	Guidance Through May 8	Phase 1 Guidance
Commercial Activity	Essential Purpose Only	All Retail At 50% Capacity With Noted Exceptions
Childcare	Child Care Open For Essential Workers Only	Childcare Open For All Working Parents
Teleworking	Encouraged	Encouraged
Bars And Restaurants	Take Out, Drive Thru, And Delivery Only	Takeout, Drive Thru, And Delivery Only
Barbers / Salons	Closed	Closed
Theaters / Music / Bowling	Closed	Closed
Gyms / Indoor Sporting	Closed	Closed
Playgrounds	Closed	Closed
Visitation To Longterm Care	Not Permitted	Not Permitted
Worship	Outdoor Or Virtual Service	Outdoor Or Virtual Service No More Than 10 Indoors
State And County Parks And Trails	Closed	Opening Encouraged
Leisure Tourism Bookings	Not Allowed	Only Allowed For Wnc Residents Of 828 Area Code
Hotels/Motels	Essential Allowed	Leisure Reservations Allowed For 828 Residents Only
Bed And Breakfast	Essential Allowed	Leisure Reservations Allowed For 828 Residents Only
Short Term Rentals/ Homestay	Essential Allowed	Leisure Reservations Allowed For 828 Residents Only
Campgrounds	Not Allowed	Leisure Reservations Allowed For 828 Residents Only
Unique Industries	Closed	No More Than 10 People Following Physical Distancing And Public Health Guidance
Outdoor Sporting Events	Not Allowed	Not Allowed
Outdoor Activities	Not Allowed	No More Than 10/No Close Contact Sports
Outdoor Sport Facilities	Closed	Closed
Libraries	Closed	Curbside Service
Community Centers	Closed	No More Than 10 People
Outdoor Recreation Activities	Closed	No More Than 10 People
Day Camps	Closed	Allowed Within Cdc Compliance
Overnight Camps	Closed	Closed
Funerals	No More Than 50	No More Than 50
Two Week Quarantine	Required For Out-Of-State Arrivals	Encouraged For Out-Of-State Arrivals

TRANSITION TO PHASE 2

At least 2-3 weeks after Phase 1

- Lift Stay At Home order with strong encouragement for vulnerable populations to continue staying at home
- Allow limited opening of restaurants, bars, and other businesses that can follow strict safety protocols (reduced capacity)
- Allow gathering at houses of worship and entertainment venues at reduced capacity
- Increase number of people allowed at gatherings
- Open public playgrounds
- Continue rigorous restrictions on nursing homes and congregate living settings

TRANSITION TO PHASE 3

At least 4-6 weeks after Phase 2

- Lessen restrictions for vulnerable populations with encouragement to continue practicing physical distancing
- Allow increased capacity at restaurants, bars, other businesses, houses of worship, and entertainment venues
- Further increase the number of people allowed at gatherings
- Continue rigorous restrictions on nursing homes and congregate care settings

The stages discussed within this document are meant to serve as a framework for planning. As a community must be prepared to adjust our plans as the situation dictates.

While progression through the stages of reopening is forecasted in weeks and months, decisions will be determined by public health metrics, data, and guidance from the state. Progress may also change based on virus trends, testing or treatment breakthroughs, or identification of new, safe ways of doing business.

Due to the ease of transmission of COVID-19, Buncombe County strongly encourages the use of face coverings when anyone goes out in public or when they may be in close contact with others.

This is a critical time to be thoughtful and careful about reopening Buncombe County. Our staff and partners are working diligently to ensure we can safely reopen our community while making the resources available for equitable access to services for vulnerable populations.



MITIGATION GUIDANCE

Reopening businesses and other sectors of the economy in Buncombe County will require close consideration of the risk of someone becoming infected with COVID-19. While mitigation strategies can be put in place to reduce the likelihood of community transmission, control of community transmission cannot be guaranteed. Thus, careful monitoring of community spread will be required, and strict social distancing measures may need to be reinstituted if a resurgence is detected. Vigilant management of COVID-19 cases will be required throughout the pandemic, even after the peak transmission period when businesses and other sectors of the economy start reopening.

Though there are many things we do not yet know about COVID-19, there is clear evidence on what types of activities put people at risk. Our consensus recommendation for staging the opening of activities and businesses is to focus on the potential for viral transmission and mitigation instead of trying to define whether particular activities or businesses are essential or not.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent contraction of COVID-19. We must bear in mind we are all in this together, and we have a responsibility to continue practicing mitigation measures.

These general mitigation guidelines are minimum recommended health protocols and are designed to be utilized at every phase of reopening. Individuals and employers should continue to adhere to federal, state, and local guidance, including information from the CDC.

Our staff and partners are working diligently to ensure we can safely reopen our community. We are also dedicated to providing necessary resources and equitable access to services for vulnerable populations within Buncombe County.