

Knox Public Health

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Knox Public Health moving forward with reopening orders

Ohio started a reopening process Friday that continues for the next two weeks, getting people back to work in several sectors. Yet, there are still many questions regarding businesses and activities that are still closed or limited. Just as they did for the statewide closures that started in mid-March, local public health officials are providing much of the explanation for what is still closed and the guidelines to be followed to allow more openings in the future.

“Despite what some people think, we want businesses to open,” said Health Commissioner Julie Miller of Knox Public Health, “and we want them to understand the guidelines to keep everyone safe.” Added Miller, “We (public health) did not decide which businesses to close, but for the most part, we understood the health and safety reasons of why they were closed.”

Moving forward, Miller said she is working with legal counsel, local business leaders, elected officials and school administrators to clarify issues and help groups make plans to adjust to continued closures. Among the discussions are the cancellation of parades and festivals which continue to be prohibited by state order. “In meeting with city and village officials, we have decided to cancel all parades until the end of May, including all Memorial Day parades,” said Miller. “These events bring too many people together in an uncontrollable environment.” The ban on parades will not, however, affect the drive-by parades which people have held to celebrate birthdays and other personal accomplishments.

With many businesses opening on Monday including healthcare, factories, construction jobs and office operations, the biggest change is the mandated wearing of facial coverings or masks for all employees. There are exceptions for health and safety reasons, but for the most part, “all employees should be masked to protect themselves as well as their co-workers and the public,” said Miller. Consumers and the general public are

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recommended to wear masks, but not required. “I am sure we will get some complaints about employees not wearing masks,” said Miller. “We have already had calls from residents concerned about employees not wearing masks and many residents are concerned that there are a lot of the general public not wearing masks.”

Miller said KPH’s response will be direct those making the complaints to contact the business management. “It’s the responsibility of the business owner to comply with the state order. And the business owner can request that customers wear a mask” said Miller. “If we get repeated complaints about a specific business, we will obviously respond, but the consumer has a right to make his or her concerns know to the business owner or manager.”

When retail stores and other consumer operations open on May 12, among those entities included will be dog groomers, one of the most contested business closings statewide. Also, opening on May 12 will be the ability to conduct garage and yard sales as well as auctions. There are specific guidelines to accompany the sales operations including social distancing, availability of hand sanitizer and the wearing of masks. “The success of being able to hold the yard sales and garage sales will rely on those who attend the sales,” said Miller. “It will be just like going to other stores. We recommend wearing a mask, using hand-sanitizer and keeping your distance from others.”

While church services were never prohibited in the stay at home order issued in March, many churches stopped holding services on Easter. With the reopening of businesses and other activities, churches are expected to return to regular services with guidelines. “Some churches are having two services, one for older members and another for younger families,” said Miller. “The separate services allow for smaller groups which makes social distancing easier. Many are recommending masks and making modification on the handing of communion sacraments such as not drinking from the same cup.”

Miller has also talked with every school district about plans for graduation “The school administrators have been working hard with parents and faculty to make this traditional event something that is meaningful, yet safe for everyone,” said Miller. “Undoubtedly, it be will be much different than ever before.” The Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Department of Health issued a joint statement on graduations suggesting virtual and drive-thru events involving all of the students or single family events. While postponing graduation has been suggested, circumstances may be no different later in the year than they are at the present time.

Gov. Mike DeWine announced during his daily press conference on Friday that opening dates for hair salons, fitness centers and dine in restaurant could come later this month. Miller said her staff will continue to help businesses adapt to the “new normal” and she is hopeful that residents will follow the guidelines. “We want to move forward, not backward.”

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