

Inslee extends stay-at-home order through May

Announces phases for lifting virus restrictions

By RACHEL LA CORTE
Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said Friday he is extending the state’s coronavirus stay-at-home order through at least May 31 and that he will ease the restrictions in four stages, starting with allowing retail curbside pickup, automobile sales and car washes by mid-May.

“We have not won this fight against this virus,” Inslee said.

There will be a minimum of three weeks between each phase, though he said some counties with lower numbers of cases and deaths may be able to open parts of their economy sooner if approved by the Department of Health.

The Democrat said the first phase would also allow drive-in spiritual services with one household per vehicle.

Since April 24, Inslee has announced the easing of some restrictions, including the resumption of existing construction projects and allowing day use activities at state parks and some outdoor recreation like hunting, golfing and fishing to start on Tuesday. Earlier this week, he said some non-urgent surgeries could also resume.

Inslee said while more outdoor activities will start next week, the ban on large gatherings will remain in effect.

The next phase would allow camping, and new construction, as well as in-store retail purchases with restrictions. Barber shops and salons could also reopen at that time, and restaurants could reopen at half capacity and table sizes limited to five. The third phase would



Ted S. Warren/AP Photo
A person wears a mask that has ‘Trump’ written on it during a protest against Washington state’s stay-at-home order on Friday in Seattle.

expand group gatherings to 50 or less, including sports activities and would allow restaurants to increase capacity to 75%. Gyms and movie theaters could reopen at half capacity, but nightclubs and entertainment venues will

still remain closed during this phase. During the last phase, most public interactions would resume, with social distancing, with bars, restaurants and entertainment and sporting venues returning to their maximum capacity.

Inslee has said several elements have been at play in his decision making, and that all of them need to see reduced risk: disease activity, health care system readiness, testing capacity and availability, an increase in case and contact investigations once a case is confirmed and risk to vulnerable populations, like those in assisted living facilities.

He said while there is continuing evidence that the spread of COVID-19 has been suppressed he urged caution in moving to lift restrictions too quickly, and said officials will look at how the state is faring after each phase, and said the three week suggestion is a minimum.

Also on Friday initiative promoter and GOP gubernatorial candidate Tim Eyman joined Franklin County Commissioner Clint Didier and others in filing a federal lawsuit against Inslee. They say the governor’s directives

have imposed “unacceptable tyranny.” The Seattle Times reports the lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington.

Washington state saw the nation’s first confirmed COVID-19 case in January, as well as the first deadly cluster, at a Seattle-area nursing home. Inslee in March was among the first governors to order sweeping social distancing restrictions.

More than 14,300 people in Washington state have tested positive for the virus, which causes mild to moderate symptoms in most patients, and at least 814 people have died. While the vast majority recover, the coronavirus is highly contagious and can be spread by those who appear healthy and can cause severe illness and death in some patients, particularly the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.



Nicole Bales/The Astorian
Cannon Beach placed restrictions on visitors over the coronavirus.

Relief: Businesses have until Wednesday to submit applications

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Along with closing hotels and other short-term rentals to most visitors, the city excluded all visitors from outside of the county. Businesses have suffered, and some argue that signs posted at the entrances of the city have created confusion, leaving people in the county feeling like the city is closed to locals, as well.

The Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce sent a poll to business owners asking what assistance they would like to see from the city. More than half said assistance through a grant program would be the most helpful. Several hotels also asked for a deferment of lodging tax payments.

The city is using a portion of lodging tax dollars to provide \$302,000 in grant funding. The businesses have until Wednesday to submit applications.

Because lodging tax dollars are being used, a business must show it has a brick-and-mortar location and that it mostly serves tourists living

outside of a 50-mile radius of Cannon Beach. Hotels are eligible for the assistance, but owners of other short-term rentals are not.

The lodging tax deferral allows hotels and other short-term rentals a one-time deferment of tax payments.

Most hotels and other short-term rentals have made payments on time in April, but for those that did not, the program allows the businesses to defer half of the payment until July 15.

Hotels that paid on time have the opportunity to defer the next quarterly payment.

“I’m appreciative that the city is able to do what it can,” Mayor Sam Steidel said. “Both as a business person and as somebody very involved in the city, I think it’s very important that we maintain open businesses.”

Steidel recused himself from the vote on the business assistance program because he owns an art gallery in the city. “The city itself is so reliant on the tourism industry that we’re hurting as much as the businesses are, so being able to do this is promising,”

he said.

Steidel said he met with County Manager Don Bohn and other mayors on Wednesday and discussed the criteria for beginning phase one of Gov. Kate Brown’s plan to reopen the economy.

He said the county has met all the criteria except for testing capacity.

“What we talked about as mayors is — that ain’t happening,” Steidel said. “And there’s not much we can do about it except try to push buttons and get people active.”

Cannon Beach Emergency Manager Rick Hudson said that Clatsop and other rural counties have only received a fraction of the tests requested.

“I’m not sure how much testing is going to be involved in all the future decisions, when it comes down to what the governor is going to get information for, because the tests just aren’t there,” he said.

Hudson said the state will likely have to look at other factors and not rely on testing capacity to make decisions moving forward.



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