

Opening Up America...from Page 1A

successfully rebound from this public health emergency.”

Kemp has extended the shelter-in-place order through the end of April. When he and governors across the U.S. do decide to reopen their respective states, they will likely be adhering closely to the president’s guidelines as enumerated at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>.

Weighing in at the local level, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said the president is making the right call letting the governors “make decisions in their state on when and how they should start reopening.”

According to the president, his “Opening Up America Again” guidelines should be implementable on a statewide or county-by-county basis at each governor’s discretion.

Before moving to a new phase, including into Phase One, the guidelines recommend that states and regions within states wait until they are experiencing downward trajectories of influenza-like illnesses and COVID-like cases reported within a 14-day period.

Furthermore, prior to proceeding through the phased comeback, states and regions should wait for a downward trajectory of documented cases or of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period.

Also, it’s recommended that hospitals be able to treat all patients without crisis care, and that they have robust testing programs in place “for at-risk healthcare workers, including emerging antibody testing,” before moving to a new phase.

If all of these “gating criteria” can be met in the leadup to each new phase, then the CDC and president believe it will be safe for states to progress through the three phases of reopening.

Of course, spikes in new cases are highly likely as more and more people venture back out into the population, and the president said recently that, if necessary, areas may need to start over if things get bad enough to shut down again.

Phase One stipulates that vulnerable individuals should continue sheltering in place, while advising everyone else to maintain proper social distancing in public, minimize non-essential travel and avoid groups of more than 10 people when social distancing can’t be followed.

For the purposes of the guidelines, vulnerable individuals are defined as the elderly and people with serious underlying health conditions.

Employers are being encouraged to promote teleworking whenever possible in Phase One and to reopen their business in stages.

Schools that are already closed should remain closed, according to Phase One guidelines, while venues like movie theaters, indoor dining areas, bars and gyms can reopen with strict physical distancing protocols. Visits to senior living facilities and hospitals should remain prohibited.

In Phase Two, vulnerable individuals should continue to shelter in place. For non-vulnerable individuals, social distancing will still be part of the rebounding process, but restrictions on gatherings will be revised upward to avoidance of social settings of more than 50 people.

All non-essential travel can resume in Phase Two, and schools/daycares will be allowed to reopen. Nursing home/hospital visits will still be prohibited, but bars may operate “with diminished standing-room occupancy.”

Finally, if states and regions meet the above “gating criteria” after initiating Phase Two, they can move

onto Phase Three, which will enable vulnerable individuals to resume public interactions while responsibly practicing social distancing.

Phase Three is when things start to look more normal again, with recommendations for low-risk populations to consider minimizing time spent in crowded environments, and employers being allowed to resume unrestricted staffing.

Senior care facilities and hospitals can welcome back visitors in Phase Three, granted they practice strict hygiene habits, and large venues may operate under more relaxed physical distancing measures.

Throughout each of the phases, individuals are advised to continue adhering to COVID-19 best practices such as frequent handwashing, maintaining social distance, and wearing facial coverings in public, even when healthy. Of course, people should stay home if sick.

Employers should continue to follow recommended guidelines for workspaces as well throughout each phase, including monitoring employees for sickness and sanitizing shared spaces.

Mass testing, including antibody tests to detect undiagnosed cases of COVID-19, will help clear up many of the uncertainties surrounding the disease, including actual transmission and mortality rates. In the long run, this will give people even more confidence to return to public life.

The demographics have shown that, so far, this disease is affecting older populations at a much higher rate than younger populations.

For example, of the 13,130 deaths reported in the U.S. between Feb. 1 and April 11, there were zero COVID-19 deaths in children under 1 year of age; 2 deaths for children aged 1-4; 1 death for children

aged 5-14; and 13 deaths in the 15-24 age range.

Influenza appears to be deadlier for children, with 11, 27, 36 and 37 respective deaths recorded in each of the above age ranges over the same time period.

The overwhelming majority of reported COVID-19 deaths between Feb. 1 and April 11 occurred in older populations: 45-54, 751 deaths; 55-64, 1,773 deaths; 65-74, 2,919 deaths; 75-84, 3,576 deaths; and 85 years and over, 3,693 deaths.

These numbers underscore the importance of vulnerable populations continuing to shelter in place while less vulnerable members of the population do all that they can to limit the spread of the highly contagious disease when out in the public sphere.

After all, if not for the society-altering social distancing measures currently being implemented everywhere at once, the numbers of infected and dead would undoubtedly be much, much worse.

As of Friday, medical trips to emergency departments and outpatient providers in Georgia for coronavirus-like illnesses were elevated compared to normal levels this time of year, but decreased compared to numbers reported the previous week.

“At this time, there is little influenza virus circulation,” the CDC said. “The levels of people presenting for care with these symptoms is likely due to COVID-19 but may be tempered by a number of factors including less influenza-like illnesses overall because of widespread adoption of social distancing efforts and changes in healthcare seeking behavior.”

Board of Education...from Page 1A

in the same capacity at Miami (Ohio). During his time in the MAC, the Redhawks led the conference in total defense during the 2016 season.

Pawlowski also owns four years of experience coaching in the Blue Ridge Mountains, handling the defensive coordinator duties from 2008-11 at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina.

In other news, board members also approved the completion certificate of the Modernization Grant. As a result of the upgrades at the middle school and high school over the past two years, the state will reimburse Towns County upwards of 75 percent of the total project budget.

Members also approved a Senior Capstone waiver, allowing 12th-graders to forgo

the Capstone Project required to graduate.

In other personnel moves, the board approved the hiring of Melissa Rommelman for a business education position at the high school.

At the elementary school, LaTisha Usher will take the assistant principal position after serving as the elementary school guidance counselor during the 2019-2020 school year.

Usher will be taking over as assistant principal from Shannon Moss, who was hired recently to serve as the new principal at the elementary school after Dr. Sandy Page announced her retirement.

District 2 Public Health announces increased specimen collection

District 2 Public Health is ramping up specimen collection to help meet Governor Kemp’s call for increased testing. This is made possible by additional testing supplies, increased laboratory capacity and expanded testing criteria. The new testing guidelines will include these groups:

Hospitalized patients; The following people with symptoms: Healthcare workers, first responders, and other critical infrastructure workers; Persons residing in long-term care facilities or other group residential settings; Persons 65 years of age and older; Patients with underlying medical conditions; Household members or care givers of any of the groups above; Persons with close contact with a known COVID-19 case.

The following people without symptoms will also be tested as capacity allows: Healthcare workers, first responders, and other critical infrastructure workers that have been exposed to COVID-19; Residents of a long-term care facility or other group residential setting experiencing an outbreak of COVID-19.



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

If you feel that you meet any of these conditions, follow these three simple steps: Call your local health department and ask to speak to a nurse about COVID-19 testing. The nurse will review your situation and submit your information for verification. Public health will call you back to arrange an appointment at the site nearest to you.

Banks County Health Department 706-677-2296; Dawson County Health Department 706-265-2611; Forsyth County Health Department 770-781-6900; Franklin County Health Department 706-384-5575; Habersham County Health Department 706-778-7156; Hall County Health Department 770-531-5600; Hart County Health Department 706-376-5117; Lumpkin County Health Department 706-867-2727; Rabun County Health Department 706-212-0289; Stephens County Health Department 706-282-4507; Towns County Health Department 706-896-2265; Union County Health Department 706-745-6292; White County Health Department 706-865-2191. NT(Apr22,22)CA