

MEDIA RELEASE

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Leaders across Orange County Encourage the Public to Continue Social Distancing

HILLSBOROUGH, N.C. April 16, 2020 — With the number of COVID-19 cases in North Carolina surpassing 5,000, officials across Orange County remind the public of the need to continue practicing social distancing.

Orange County Board of Commissioners Chair Penny Rich credits the public's efforts so far at helping to flatten the curve but warns that now is not the time to ease up.

"I want to thank the community for adhering to the stay at home order," she said. "I recognize that physical distancing is a major interruption in our daily lives and livelihoods, but it is slowing the spread of the disease. The next several weeks are critical in reducing infection rates. To that end, please be aware that gatherings of any size increase the risk of exposure and will effectively undo the sacrifices we have all made thus far."

While hospitalizations and fatalities continue to rise, the rate of acceleration is slowing, said Dr. Mandy Cohen, director of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

"The doubling rate is extending, and that's a good thing," she said at a Tuesday afternoon news conference. "That tells us that we're slowing the rate of acceleration. And it tells us that all the hard work we're doing to stay at home is working."

Before North Carolina can begin to emerge from the pandemic, it must reach a peak in the number of reported cases, the state health director said. The modeling does not yet show when the virus's spread will abate, she said.

While a return to normalcy is desired, leaders across the county urge the community to continue social distancing, to avoid gatherings of any size, and to participate in recreational activities safely.

"As the virus approaches its surge point in our state, it is more important than ever that everyone stay at home and practice physical distancing as much as possible," said Carrboro Mayor Lydia Lavelle, Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger and Hillsborough Mayor Jenn Weaver in a joint statement. "All these safety measures are saving lives, and it is crucial we maintain these policies. We are all so grateful to our health care professionals and other essential personnel working on the front lines to keep us safe."

The county stay at home order is in effect through April 30. Governor Roy Cooper has instituted a statewide stay-at-home order through April 29. It is unknown if either of these will be extended or modified.

Continue Social Distancing

The goal of social distancing, also called physical distancing, is to flatten the curve, so hospitals and the system overall do not become overwhelmed.

“So far we have done a great job of this in Orange County, which is why we have not had a surge nor seen hospitals with patients on the floor,” Orange County Health Director Quintana Stewart said. “This is a great thing!”

Practice social distancing by:

- Staying home as much as possible, except for essential travel.
- Maintaining at least 6 feet of space between yourself and other individuals when out in public and with crowds of any size.
- Avoiding any gatherings.

Note that staying 6 feet from others should be adhered to even when wearing a cloth face covering. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now [recommends use of a cloth face covering for everyone](#), particularly if you are in an environment where social distancing is difficult, such as grocery stores or pharmacies.

Recreate Safely

During the stay at home order, getting exercise and enjoying the outdoors is allowed and is especially important for mental and physical health. The public is encouraged to take a walk, ride a bike, hike, and jog. A cloth face covering can be brought along during outings in case there are areas where it is not possible to keep at least 6 feet away from others.

When participating in recreational activities, be aware that sharing equipment can transmit the virus. This is why playgrounds have been closed. Viruses that cause illnesses such as COVID-19 and the seasonal flu are often spread via direct exposure to respiratory droplets expelled in the sneezes or coughs of a sick person, but they can also live on surfaces and inanimate objects for days at a time. Disease transmission also can occur before any symptoms are shown.

Additional Tips to Flatten the Curve

To lower the risk of spreading respiratory infections, including COVID-19, the Orange County Health Department also encourages everyone to:

- Stay home when you are sick.
- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Call your doctor if you are experiencing symptoms.

Reliable Information

The Orange County Health Department is now providing a weekly summary of cases on Fridays, starting this week. The state updates its [COVID-19 case count dashboard](#) daily at 11 a.m.

For the latest information and guidance relating to Orange County's COVID-19 response:

- Visit www.orangecountync.gov/coronavirus.
- Receive daily text updates on the crisis by texting 888-777 with OCNCEALTH for English speakers and OCNCALUD for Spanish speakers.
- Sign up for a twice weekly e-newsletter about the COVID-19 response via the [county website](#).
- Follow the Orange County Health Department on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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Orange County leaders before social distancing requirements (from left): Hillsborough Mayor Jenn Weaver, Orange County Commissioners Chair Penny Rich, Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger and Carrboro Mayor Lydia Lavelle
Photo Credit: Chapelboro