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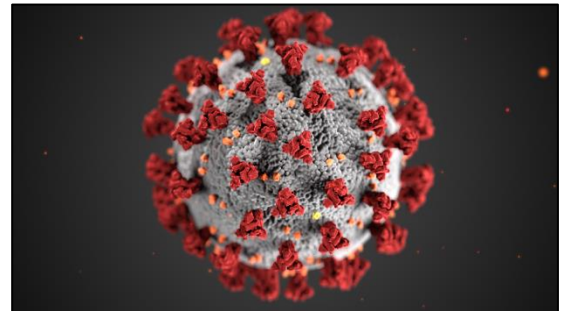
May 18th, 2020 eNewsletter
Volume 121

Update on COVID-19 Case Count

According to the Department of Health and Human Service's official count as of May 17th, North Carolina has 18,512 cases. There are 493 people hospitalized with COVID-19 with 659 confirmed deaths.

You can visit the state's COVID-19 dashboard to see how we are doing on the important benchmarks we need to meet to ease stay-at-home restrictions and see demographic data, zip code counts, and other info:

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/covid-19-case-count-nc>



General Assembly Set to Return to Legislative Session Today

The General Assembly returns to legislative session today. There is a lot of important work to do.

Here is a list of bills I have co-sponsored that need to be acted on:

- HB 1040 Healthcare for Working North Carolinians (Medicaid Expansion).
- HB 1046 COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave.
- HB 1057 WC/COVID-19 Front Line Coverage/Funds.
- HB 1133 UI/Flexibility For Interstate Work.

Returning to Work and How It Impacts Unemployment

As North Carolina has entered Phase 1 of Governor Cooper's plan to ease COVID-19 restrictions, more businesses will be reopening, and more people will be returning to work.

The Division of Employment Security (DES) is providing the following information for individuals and employers about how returning to work may impact unemployment benefits.

Refusing to return to work when your employer calls you back typically makes you ineligible to receive unemployment benefits. When you return to work, you should stop filing your Weekly Certifications for unemployment.

DES will consider that you have good cause to refuse to return to work, and may continue to be eligible for unemployment benefits, if you refuse due to one of these COVID-19 related reasons:

1. You have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and have been advised by a medical professional to not attend work.
2. A member of your household has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or you are providing care for a family member or a member of your household who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.
3. You are at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines a high-risk individual as a person 65 years of age or older, or a person of any age, who has serious underlying medical conditions including being immunocompromised, or has chronic lung disease, moderate-to-severe asthma, serious heart conditions, severe obesity, diabetes, chronic kidney disease and undergoing dialysis, or liver disease.
4. You are the primary caregiver of a child or person in your household who is unable to attend school or another facility that is closed as a direct result of the COVID-19 public health emergency, and the school or facility is required for you to work.
5. You are unable to reach your place of employment because of a quarantine imposed as a direct result of the COVID-19 public health emergency or you have been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19.
6. In order to comply with any governmental order regarding travel, business operations and mass gatherings, you must refuse a recall to your former employment or an offer of suitable work.

7. You reasonably believe there is a valid degree of risk to your health and safety due to a significant risk of exposure or infection to COVID-19 at your employer's place of business due to a failure of the employer to comply with guidelines as set out by the CDC, other governmental authorities or industry groups as may be found in CDC guidance, the Governor's Executive Orders, or other binding authority; or due to objective reasons that the employer's facility is not safe for the claimant to return to work.

[Frequently Asked Questions](#) about returning to work.

Court Clears Way for Churches to Open without Restrictions

On Saturday, a Federal Court judge entered a temporary restraining order allowing churches to disregard the Governor's Executive Order. Of course, there is an old saying that just because you can, does not mean you should. In that vain, I wanted to pass along a piece written by Rep. James D. Gailliard who is the Senior Pastor of the 3,000 member Word Tabernacle Church in Rocky Mount.

Why Church Buildings Should not Re-Open.....Yet

Over 500 years ago, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenburg igniting what we know as the Protestant Reformation. Two thousand years ago an innocent man was crucified outside the city on a hill called Golgotha paving the way for all of mankind to be saved. The two most significant acts of the Christian church both occurred outside the church building. Not to mention, the Apostle Paul spent most of his ministry physically distanced from those he repeatedly expressed he longed to see. Yet, somehow, churches were planted and the New Testament was written. Buildings are important, but they are not to be worshipped.



The notion that Christians cannot worship without assembling together in a building is flawed both scripturally and historically.

The recent lawsuit filed in Greenville federal court blocking the Governor's Executive Order restricting indoor religious services asserts that churches are being treated differently than retailers and other secular businesses. Well, churches are different. Churches should have stricter re-opening guidelines than restaurants or hair salons for the simple fact that we gather far more people in close contact for longer periods of time. Reduced to the lowest common denominator, the church gathers people. We refer to our memberships as "congregations", "fellowships", "assemblies". The typical church gathers 10-100 times the

people of any other community-based business and North Carolina has more churches than any other state in America except Texas and Florida.

More importantly, churches are the only community-based business with the mission to love our neighbors. One infected person in a gathering of even 100 people puts at risk an entire community. This is not loving. It is especially not loving to African Americans who are disproportionately impacted by this disease. Churches continue to worship and develop disciples – virtually. In many situations churches are growing. Our first amendment rights have not been violated.

So, while God has allowed for this season of evangelism, racial reconciliation and innovation, the response has become- “let’s sue.”

Churches that open too quickly are treading on dangerous ground. Each congregation should assess within their local church context, “what is our real motivation for opening now?” If it’s because of money, then I would remind you of Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:24 – “No one can serve two masters...” If it’s because of loyalty to conservative ideology, political party or race, then consider Colossians 3:3 “...your life is now hidden with Christ.”

These are hard times for us all and we need the church more now than ever. I too am eager to hug our members again; I just want to have as many of them alive as possible to hug.

Governor Cooper Proclaims May Mental Health Month

Governor Roy Cooper proclaimed May as Mental Health Awareness Month in North Carolina. Nationally this month is used to reduce the stigma regarding mental health and encourage individuals to seek the medical help they may need.

One in five adults struggle with mental health challenges in a given year, and during this month people are encouraged to hold open conversations that support and respect individuals living with mental illness. The majority of individuals with mental illness do not receive the treatment they need.

During the COVID-19 pandemic it is important that all North Carolinians pay attention to their physical and mental well-being. While activities many perform as part of their daily lives have been limited, people are encouraged to practice safe, socially distant outdoor exercise and meditation. There are also newly expanded opportunities to safely receive mental health services through telehealth during the course of the pandemic.

North Carolinians can call Hope4NC at 1-855-587-3463 for mental health support.

Visit covid19.ncdhhs.gov/hope for more wellness resources.

We are Now in Phase 1 of Easing Restrictions

Governor Roy Cooper signed [Executive Order No. 138](#) to modify North Carolina's Stay At Home order and transition to Phase 1 of slowly easing certain COVID-19 restrictions effective Friday, May 8 at 5 pm. Certain businesses will remain closed.

The Order removes the distinction between essential and non-essential businesses. Retail businesses are allowed to open at 50% capacity and will be required to direct customers to stand 6 feet apart, perform frequent cleanings, provide hand sanitizer when available, screen workers for symptoms, and more. The Order allows people to leave their homes for commercial activity at any business that is open.

Certain businesses remain closed, including bars, personal care businesses, entertainment venues, and gyms. Restaurants may only continue to serve customers for drive-through, take out, and delivery.

All workers at retail and other businesses are recommended to wear cloth face coverings. Teleworking is still encouraged for businesses that can practice it.

Though small outdoor gatherings will be allowed in Phase 1, gatherings of more than 10 people are still prohibited. The Order encourages cloth face coverings to be worn when outside the home and in contact with others. Everyone who uses a face covering should adhere to this guidance without fear of profiling or bias.

During Phase 1, childcare facilities will be open to serve families of parents who are working or looking for work. These centers will be required to follow strict cleaning protocols. Summer day camps can operate in compliance with NC DHHS guidelines.

In explaining the Order, Governor Cooper and Secretary Cohen reported North Carolina remains stable on the following key metrics:

Trajectory in COVID-Like Illness (CLI) Surveillance Over 14 Days

- North Carolina's syndromic surveillance trend for COVID-like illness is decreasing.

Trajectory of Lab-Confirmed Cases Over 14 Days

- North Carolina's trajectory of lab-confirmed cases over the last 14 days cases is slightly increasing.

Trajectory in Percent of Tests Returning Positive Over 14 Days

- North Carolina's trajectory in percent of tests returning positive over the last 14 days is decreasing.

Trajectory in Hospitalizations Over 14 Days

- North Carolina's trajectory of hospitalizations over the last 14 days is level.

In addition to these metrics, the state continues building capacity to be able to adequately respond to an increase in virus spread. These areas include:

Laboratory Testing

- North Carolina has doubled the daily testing rate.

Tracing Capability

- The Carolina Community Tracing Collaborative has received over 4,000 applications and is in the process of hiring 250 new contact tracers.

Personal Protective Equipment

- Supply chains continue to improve with the exception of gowns.

What's new in Phase One		
On Friday, May 8 at 5pm , North Carolina will move into Phase One. The Stay at Home order remains in place with some modifications. Here's what Phase One means for our state:		
	Through May 8	Phase One
Commercial activity	People should only leave home for essential purposes (food, medicine, etc)	People can leave home for commercial activity and more businesses are open
Retail	20% capacity allowed	50% capacity allowed with cleaning and social distancing
Gatherings	10 person limit	10 person limit-gathering outdoors with friends allowed
Childcare	Childcare centers open for essential workers only	Childcare centers open for working parents or those looking for work
Teleworking	Encouraged	Encouraged
Bars and Restaurants	Take-out and delivery	Take-out and delivery
Barbers/Salons/Massage	Closed	Closed
Theaters, Music Venues, Bowling Alleys	Closed	Closed
Gyms	Closed	Closed
Playgrounds	Closed	Closed
Visitation at Longterm Care Centers	Not allowed	Not allowed
Worship Services	Outdoor services allowed	Outdoor services allowed
State Parks and Trails	Local discretion	Opening encouraged
Face Coverings	Encouraged	Encouraged

The order is in effect until 5 pm on Friday, May 22. However, the end of this Order does not necessarily mean the state will move to Phase 2. Phase 2 will only start if data and indicators are in the right place.

Read [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about the Order.

North Carolina Health Insurance Options

Many North Carolinians have recently lost health insurance benefits due to the economic effects of COVID-19. If you are in need of health insurance, NCDHHS has created a [healthcare option list](#) to help you find options that may work for you and your family. If you recently lost your employer-based insurance, you may qualify for special enrollment programs, and should check your status at [healthcare.gov](#).

Limited Reopening of Most State Parks

State parks are partially reopened, including most trails and restrooms.

Visitor centers, exhibits, meeting rooms, community buildings, picnic shelters, and retail areas will remain closed to enable staff to focus on cleaning restrooms and implementing social distancing on trails and other open areas.

No campgrounds are yet open. Campgrounds are expected to open May 22. Group camps will not open until at least June 30. No facility rentals will be available, including picnic shelters.

Please check park pages for park hours. Some parks may close early.

Parking will be limited to available spaces to keep parks under capacity. Overflow parking will not be allowed. Several parks will further limit parking capacity to allow for social distancing.

For more information and to see individual park details visit: <https://www.ncparks.gov/OPEN>



School Buses to Serve as Wi-Fi Hot Spots for Remote Learning

Starting last week, additional school buses will bring internet access to communities without it to help more North Carolina students connect to school online. Governor Roy Cooper announced the plan to equip more school buses with hotspots following the announcement that K-12 public schools

would continue remote learning through the end of this school year. As many as 280 more school buses will be equipped with Wi-Fi thanks to donations from AT&T, Google and Duke Energy Foundation.

The buses will travel to underserved areas in school districts and park in designated locations, such as a school nutrition meal distribution site or a grocery store, so students

can use this temporary access to turn in assignments, download materials and connect with teachers. The drive-up Wi-Fi access will also be available for all residents in the communities to use to connect to healthcare providers, apply for unemployment, and access other critical information and services while exercising appropriate social distancing precautions.

These buses will join the hundreds of other free Wi-Fi hotspots from providers across the state who are already providing locations where residents can access the internet during this crisis.

Schools in Avery, Bertie, Bladen, Burke, Caswell, Chowan, Columbus, Duplin, Edgecombe, Franklin, Gaston, Gates, Halifax, Harnett, Hertford, Johnston, Martin, Montgomery, Northampton, Perquimans, Person, Randolph (includes Asheboro City Schools), Robeson, Sampson (includes Clinton City Schools), Scotland, Tyrrell, Vance, Wayne, Warren and Yadkin counties will receive the first 156 Wi-Fi hotspots. Outreach to other school systems to determine the location of additional hot spots is ongoing.

Local school officials will determine the exact locations and schedules for school bus Wi-Fi hot spots in their communities. Additional information, including links for locations, will be added to NCDIT's webpage when available at www.ncbroadband.gov/covid19.

Other News

[For workers who've lost jobs, what are the options for health insurance?](#)

North Carolina Health News

[Antibody Tests Show Few In N.C. Have Been Exposed To Virus](#)

WUNC

[Antibiotic Resistance Is Still A Top Health Worry. It's A Pandemic Worry, Too](#)

Public Radio East

[Most of nearly 300 Wilkes Co. coronavirus cases are linked to Tyson Foods plant](#)

WBTV

[N.C. surpasses \\$1 billion in federal unemployment insurance benefit payments](#)

Winston-Salem Journal

[Child care centers say they're still in need as they reopen to working parents](#)

EDNC

[As NCDOT cash runs low, employees and projects are in jeopardy](#)

News & Record

[NC passes 1 million unemployment claims](#)

WRAL

[Coronavirus gains a foothold in rural North Carolina](#)

North Carolina Health News

[Gun Violence Reduction Programs Struggle With Long-Term Success](#)

WUNC

[Medicaid Expansion States May See Lower Uninsurance Amid COVID-19](#)

Health Payer Intelligence

Former Member Larry Womble Passes Away.

In honor of the late Larry Womble, former NC State Representative, Governor Roy Cooper is extending the notice for all United States and North Carolina flags at state facilities. Flags are to remain lowered to half-staff through sunset on Monday, May 18, 2020.

Larry Womble's political career spans more than three decades. He was elected to represent North Carolina's 71st District in 1995, where he served until 2012. A notable advocate for the minority and underserved communities, Womble was a strong activist for the 2009 Racial Justice Act, which created a method for death row prisoners to contest their sentences. Prior to his role in the NC General Assembly, Womble served three terms as alderman for the City of Winston-Salem from 1981-1993. Womble passed away on Thursday, May 14.



Statement from Governor Cooper:

"Former Representative Larry Womble spent his life advocating for racial justice and education equality in North Carolina. Our prayers are with his family, loved ones and the Winston-Salem community."

I served a few terms with Rep. Womble until he was severely injured in an auto accident back in 2013. He always wore a purple suit on the last day of session. Still today, many members wear purple on the last day of session in his honor. He made a difference in the lives of so many through his service to this state.

Contact Me

My office is Room 506 of the Legislative Office Building and my office phone number is 733-5974. ***DUE TO THE STAY AT HOME ORDER, WE ARE NOT CURRENTLY IN THE OFFICE. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO STILL CALL OR EMAIL. Angela and I are working to answer your every question.*** My email address is darren.jackson@ncleg.net. I look forward to hearing from and working with you. I am grateful for the opportunity to

serve. As always, please feel free to contact my office if you have any questions or concerns.

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