



An Update Regarding "Reopening" Loudoun County

The Latest Developments

As you may have seen this morning, elected leaders from the "Big 5" Northern Virginia jurisdictions - Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax County, Loudoun County, and Prince William County - sent a letter to Governor Northam advising him that the criteria he set forth for Phase 1 of his "Forward Virginia" reopening blueprint has not been met in our jurisdictions.

The criteria announced by the Governor and established by the Virginia Department of Health are consistent with federal (CDC) guidelines and consistent with best practices and the decision-making processes that are being used around the globe. These criteria include a reduction in the overall number of COVID-19 cases, a decrease in the amount of citizens hospitalized from COVID-19, adequate hospital and ICU space, and adequate supplies of testing and personal protective equipment (PPE) - all over a 2 week period.

When the Governor indicated last week that he believed those criteria would be met on May 15, he also indicated that there may be differences in various regions of the state. Following the Governor's

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announcement and with the direction of his office, the Chief Administrative Officers (the lead staff members) for each jurisdiction began meeting to discuss the situation in Northern Virginia. The CAOs asked the Health Directors in each jurisdiction to conduct an analysis to determine if the criteria was met in our jurisdiction.

You can read that analysis [here](#). Essentially, it states that the number of hospitalized patients in our region is continuing to grow, and that PPE supplies are not adequate in many facilities. The Health Directors found it difficult to evaluate the other criteria due to the lack of timely data, which they have since requested from the state.

Ultimately, it will be Governor Northam's decision to either maintain his current Executive Orders in the NOVA region, or exempt NOVA from the new ones he will be issuing that implement Phase 1. It is the opinion of the governmental bodies of the 5 jurisdictions that the Governor should exclude NOVA from Phase 1. This opinion follows the recommendation of both the Health Directors and the Chief Administrative Officers.

My Thoughts

As difficult as it is to maintain the current status, I supported the decision to delay Phase 1 implementation in Northern Virginia. Quite simply, it makes very little sense to me to have done all that we have with social distancing and vastly reduced activities over the past 2 months just to begin abandoning it right when the data shows that our County is hitting its peak.

To be clear - the risk of getting COVID-19 in Loudoun County is higher right now than it ever has been.

Ultimately, the goal of government leaders and the public cannot and should not be the Governor's Phase 1, which is still fairly limited. It should be to get back to as close to normal as we can with as few restrictions

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as possible (which is essentially Phase 3 in the Governor's plan). That includes opening back up restaurants, entertainment venues, and schools. I had extensive discussions with the Loudoun County Administrator over the past several days about this issue. It is his opinion, which I share, that waiting until we meet the established criteria for Phase 1 will lead to us reaching this ultimate goal faster than a Phase 1 opening at this point in time, with cases at their peak.

I understand that a continued delay is very painful for our local businesses. But ultimately, I believe that the sooner we can get them back to regular operations, the better it will be for them and for their customers.

There are a couple of practical considerations to consider. As the Health Directors indicated in their analysis, there is still a critical lack of PPE in our region. While our hospitals themselves have adequate supplies, other medical facilities do not. As I wrote in my last newsletter, in Loudoun this is a critical problem at nursing homes and older adult facilities. These facilities do not have adequate PPE for their employees and as a result, residents are not receiving the level of care that they should be. While it is easy to dismiss COVID-19 as being primarily an issue for older Americans and those with preexisting health issues, the fact is that many of our own loved ones are in this category and we owe it to them to make sure they are taken care of. (It is also not entirely true; even in Loudoun County we have had perfectly healthy, younger people get very sick from this virus. While thankfully we have not had any fatalities of those under 50, getting seriously ill and being hospitalized has long lasting implications that shouldn't be brushed aside). At this moment, Loudoun County government is not in a position to provide much help to these facilities, because we are still fighting every day to ensure that we have adequate supplies for our own operations.

What does this have to do with the "reopening?" Well, as many businesses reopen and see higher volumes, they themselves will begin consuming more PPE for

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their own employees. This will only exacerbate the shortage in medical facilities, doctors and specialist offices, and so on. Essentially, we are still in a position of having to triage PPE, and the PPE supplies aren't adequate for those in critical need yet. We have people in our County government who are spending hours on this issue every day, and I do believe we will continue to see some improvement.

As I also mentioned, testing supplies vary widely and criteria for testing has not been stepped down, which I think is another essential piece of reopening. There has been progress on the Loudoun County testing task force that I have been advocating for, and my understanding is that this group is in the process of assembling and beginning to meet. It is my hope that they can help us break through the various supply chain issues and give recommendations both to us in government and to the public.

Addressing Some Common Questions

Wasn't the goal to flatten the curve? Haven't we done that?

Overall, we have done a good job of flattening the curve. It is impossible to argue what would have happened if another path was taken, but we have done a good job ensuring that there has not been a sudden rush of patients that would overwhelm our medical institutions, as has happened in other places. The question now should be "where are we on the curve?" Based on the data provided and the modeling that the County is consulting, it looks like we're pretty much at the top of it. Our projects show that we should start seeing a decline in cases by the end of the month, which would indicate that we are on the right side of the curve. The goal is indeed to flatten the curve, we just aren't quite at the point in time where we can say it has been accomplished.

At what point can we begin reopening? If we wait for testing and vaccines it may be months.

I personally think the way the Governor went about this process is confusing. He announced a Phase 1 reopening date prior to consulting with the leaders in this region, instead of waiting for our input. That said, the message has been consistent: we should begin reopening when the criteria that the Governor originally outlined are met. I don't know exactly when that will be, but I'm optimistic we are moving in the right direction. As I also said, I believe that being cautious now will ultimately get us back to normal sooner.

What About Politics?

Well okay, the question isn't going to be framed that way. But the reactions are often political in nature and I want to address them. This is not a partisan issue. The elected leaders that signed the letter requesting the delay belong to a different political party than I do. Unfortunately the reaction to this issue has largely fallen on partisan lines. But it shouldn't. The Health Directors and the Chief Administrative Officers are not the least bit political. The CAOs are also dealing with the financial implications of COVID-19 including revenue losses from businesses, so they are extremely sensitive to that issue. Agree or disagree, the data is there, and I really wish everything wasn't viewed through a partisan framework.

As I mentioned, the Governor has the final authority to decide exactly what gets implemented this Friday. Once we have more information, we'll share it. Please stay healthy and as always, [let us know](#) if our office can help.

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