



The Navajo Nation
Office of the President and Vice President

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**Navajo Nation to implement “soft reopening” under revised guidelines
as COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations decline and vaccinations increase**

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Wednesday, the Navajo Department of Health issued Public Health Emergency Order No. 2021-005, which will transition the Navajo Nation from “red status” to “orange status” in accordance with gating measures and indicators that take into account several factors including the declining number of COVID-19 cases, testing availability, hospital capacity and bed usage, and contact tracing. Under a separate “safer-at-home” order, the Navajo Nation will continue its daily curfew from 9:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. (MDT) seven days a week and outlines revised provisions for gatherings. Both public health orders go into effect on Monday, March 15.

According to public health officials, the Navajo Nation has met all gating measures and indicators to transition to “orange status” due to a consistent downward trajectory in new infections of COVID-19, less than 80-percent inpatient hospital and ICU bed usage, and an infection rate of 0.81 over the last seven days, which indicates that the Nation can expect to see fewer cases. As of Wednesday, the Navajo Nation has had 24 consecutive days with less than 50 new COVID-19 cases and 13 consecutive days with less than 25 reported. As of March 9, the Navajo Area Indian Health Service reported that 195,554 total vaccine doses have been received, 141,797 administered, which represents nearly 73-percent so far. 52,433 individuals have received a first and second dose of the vaccines.

The new provisions for businesses under the “orange status” include:

- All businesses will be required to submit a COVID-19 Reopening Plan to the Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development before reopening in Orange Status. Reopening plans can be emailed to: navajoeconomy@navajo-nsn.gov
- 25% capacity allowed for most businesses
- Restaurants and Dining facilities: drive-thru and curbside permissible
- Restaurants with permanent outdoor dining structures may provide outdoor dining at 25% of maximum capacity, as long as social distancing between tables is enforced
- Restaurants without permanent outdoor dining structures are allowed up to 10 outdoor tables (max 4 persons per table), as long as social distancing between tables is enforced
- Personal Care and Services: service by appointment only and allow time for cleaning between appointments
- Marinas and parks: appointment only
- Casinos and video poker: Navajo casinos are allowed to open to Navajo Nation residents and employees only, in accordance with a reopening and workplace safety plan

- Businesses shall limit operations before 6:00 a.m. (MDT) and after 8:00 p.m. (MDT)
- Not Allowed in Orange Status: youth programs, museums, flea markets, roadside markets, gyms, recreation facilities, movie theaters.

“This is not a full reopening as some states are doing. Instead, this is a carefully-crafted soft reopening that includes specific guidelines to continue helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19 while allowing more businesses to reopen at no more than 25-percent capacity along with strict provisions. We continue to rely on the data and the advice of public health experts as we move forward in this pandemic. The recent data shows that there is a consistent reduction in new infections, a reduction in hospital visits and hospital bed usage, and very high rates of vaccinations across the Navajo Nation,” said Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez.

He added, “It’s been nearly one year since the first confirmed case of COVID-19 on the Navajo Nation and we’ve all learned a lot about the virus and how to keep ourselves safe and healthy. The COVID-19 variants are still a concern in many regions of the country and we will continue to monitor the spread and if there is a change in the trend of new infections and hospitalizations, we will quickly revisit our public health emergency orders. We encourage everyone to continue taking on the personal responsibility of staying home as much as possible, wearing one or two masks, avoiding large crowds, practicing social distancing, and washing your hands often.”

Public Health Emergency Order No. 2021-006 outlines the safer-at-home order that requires individuals to exercise personal responsibility to remain safe and exercise caution when engaging in public activities. Gatherings of 10 or fewer people are permitted. Updated CDC guidance for vaccinated persons to gather is currently under review and further guidance will be provided in the future. The new public health orders do not address the reopening of schools. The Nez-Lizer Administration continues to support online learning for all schools on the Navajo Nation for the time being, this position is also supported by resolutions from the Navajo Nation Board of Education and the Navajo Nation Council.

Additionally, the order outlines specific safety guidelines and requirements for traditional ceremonies of no more than 10 people in attendance and churches at no more than 25% capacity with social distancing mandates, masks required, and prohibitions on sharing items/objects.

“Personal responsibility is key to staying safe and continuing the reduction in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. For nearly a year, we’ve implemented many safety and preventative measures, but at some point, we have to take careful steps to safely reopen in stages. We strongly encourage everyone to continue practicing all precautions and keep your guard up. Vaccinations are another key component that is helping to reduce the number of new cases, and we hope to continue seeing more of our Navajo people receiving the vaccines. Please be safe, make good decisions for you and your loved ones, and keep praying,” said Vice President Myron Lizer.

The public health emergency orders are available online at: <https://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19>. For more information, including helpful prevention tips, and resources to help stop the spread of COVID-19, visit the Navajo Department of Health's COVID-19 website: <http://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19>.

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