



GOVERNOR’S PLAN TO REOPEN THE STATE

“We’ve come up with a phased plan to re-open New York so every region in the state has the same opening template as we begin this process.”

Governor Cuomo

At today’s daily press conference, Governor Cuomo said that following the expiration of the May 14th Executive Order placing the state on “pause”, he would evaluate the opening of the state’s businesses on a regional basis. Saying he had spoken with every nation that had come through the pandemic (as well as other states) he and his team have created a template that will objectively determine if a region can be safely opened. Even then, businesses would be evaluated based on criteria like whether social distancing and the use of personal protective equipment could be maintained in the regular course of work.

Cuomo indicated that he would have a decision on the reopening of school buildings by the end of this week. However, he did a bit of foreshadowing today, saying that schools and businesses need to be opened together to address child care issues of working parents. One would conclude then that he will reopen school buildings in regions that have been allowed to reopen for businesses. This approach would diverge from that of other states that have simply set the policy for the entire state. Currently, 37 states have indicated they will not reopen school buildings this academic year. The governor has previously said that school reopening would be a massive undertaking requiring a plan for regular disinfection of the facilities, students being able to distance, etc. How this could be accomplished is difficult to fathom. No students between periods in the halls together, perhaps only half of the student body in the buildings at any given

time, half on site and half virtual instruction, 2nd graders wearing masks all day, etc. may all be part of that plan and would pose huge logistical and social challenges.

The concern of course is that rural New York has been comparatively free of COVID-19 cases and the reopening of some regions makes them an immediate destination for those who remain cooped up in areas still shut down. In our state, it's easy to imagine pent up New York City and New Jersey residents immediately heading to rural New York: All you have to do is name our rural areas....the Finger Lakes, Adirondacks, Catskills, Thousand Islands, Western NY Wine Country. You name it, they become a new focus of attention and thus an increased risk of a rising infection rate as those from areas with several times an area's current rate migrate in and interact with local residents. Of immediate concern of course is that many of our rural areas have comparatively few health care facilities. Overwhelming them with an influx of new COVID-19 cases would be an easy task for a pent up horde of travelers seeking a break from being locked up in a high rise apartment. If that is allowed to happen, schools almost immediately become a centralized distribution point for the virus, transmitting it (often unknowingly as children can be symptom free) to vulnerable community members.

The data driven reopening plan and its creators are sensitive to that possibility. What is allowed to reopen according to the governor, can be shut down again if the numbers increase above their limit. Rates of infection and the percentage of total hospital capacity will not be allowed over the limits set out below. The possibility of reopening and then reclosing would obviously wreak havoc on schools, but districts have proved themselves to be versatile and innovative thus far, perhaps inspiring the governor to believe us capable of handling any change of circumstances.

Looming on the horizon of course is not only the reopening of buildings, but state aid cuts as well. Students will be returning to schools that may well need to alter curricula, cut staff and activities in order to make ends meet. The approach reminds me of the old adage that "we've been doing so much with so little for so long that we can now do anything with nothing." Let's hope we're not so severely tested.

GOVERNOR'S REOPENING CRITERIA

1. **CDC Guidelines:** Based on CDC recommendations, once a region experiences a 14-day decline in the hospitalization rate they may begin a phased re-opening.
2. **Industries:** Businesses in each region will re-open in phases. Phase one will include opening construction and manufacturing functions with low risk. Phase two will open certain industries based on priority and risk level. Businesses considered "more essential" with inherent low risks of infection in the workplace and to customers will be prioritized, followed by other businesses considered "less essential" or those that present a higher risk of infection spread. Regions must not open attractions or businesses that would draw a large number of visitors from outside the local area.
3. **Business Precautions:** Each business and industry must have a plan to protect employees and consumers, make the physical work space safer and implement processes that lower risk of infection in the business.

4. **Building Health Care Capacity:** To maintain the phased re-opening plan, each region must have at least 30 percent of hospital beds and ICU beds available after elective surgeries resume.
5. **Testing Regimen:** Regions must implement a testing regimen that prioritizes symptomatic persons and individuals who came into contact with a known COVID-positive person, and conducts frequent tests of frontline and essential workers. Regions must maintain an appropriate number of testing sites to accommodate its population and must fully advertise where and how people can get tested. The region must also use the collected data to track and trace the spread of the virus.
6. **Tracing System:** There must be at least 30 contact tracers for every 100,000 people. The region must also monitor the regional infection rate throughout the re-opening plan.
7. **Isolation Facilities:** Regions must present plans to have rooms available for people who test positive for COVID-19 and who cannot self-isolate.
8. **Regional Coordination:** Regions must coordinate the re-opening of schools, transportation systems, testing and tracing with other surrounding regions.
9. **Re-imagining Tele-Medicine**
10. **Re-imagining Tele-Education**
11. **Regional Control Rooms:** Each region must appoint an oversight institution as its control room to monitor regional indicators during the phased re-opening, including hospital capacity, rate of infection, PPE burn rate and businesses.
12. **Protect and Respect Essential Workers:** Regions must continue to ensure protections are in place for essential workers.