

# SAN JUAN BASIN public health

## Media Release

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## For Immediate Release

### **La Plata County Will Move to COVID-19 Dial Level Red: Severe Risk; Immediate Community Action Needed to Preserve Critical Services and Health Care Capacity**

**Durango, Colo.:** To reduce community transmission and slow a dramatic rise in cases that threatens our ability to maintain hospital capacity and the workforce in critical services, San Juan Basin Public Health (SJBPH) and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) are moving La Plata County to COVID-19 Dial Level Red: Severe Risk beginning Friday, November 20. The new Severe Risk level is not the same as a Stay-at-Home Order, which was previously colored red on the state dial, but it does entail new public health restrictions on businesses, events, and social gatherings.

Moving levels is urgently needed to flatten case growth in La Plata County. The disease is prevalent enough in the community that it is leading to daily exposures and staff quarantines in all types of workplaces, including agencies providing critical services. A decrease in case growth is urgently needed to prevent shortages at first responder agencies, health care facilities, and critical infrastructure facilities that keep our society functioning. Reduction in growth rates will also promote a safe winter holiday season. Previous holidays have been associated with a spike in cases as people are in contact with family and friends outside their household, especially indoors.

SJBPH anticipates that between one-third and one-half of counties in Colorado will move to Level Red: Severe Risk this week.

Moving to Level Red: Severe Risk makes the following major changes to businesses, events and social gatherings:

- In-person social gatherings with people outside your household, in any setting, are prohibited, even with social distancing.
- Restaurants may only offer takeout, curbside, delivery, and outdoor (open-air) service. Outdoor on-premise service may be used by one household per table.
- Last call is moved to 8:00 p.m. to reduce the chances of late-night social spread of the virus.
- Office-based businesses must reduce their in-person workforce to 10%.
- Gyms and fitness centers must reduce their indoor capacity to 10% or no more than ten people per room, whichever is smaller, by reservation only.

- Indoor events and entertainment venues will be closed. Outdoor event venues may remain open with additional restrictions.

According to the state COVID-19 Dial, Level Red: Severe Risk restrictions are warranted when any of three metrics are met. La Plata County currently meets one of the three: 350 or more new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 residents in the last 14 days. For La Plata County, this works out to 197 cases or more in 14 days. La Plata County passed this threshold on November 8 and has had 426 cases in the last 14 days.

“Earlier in the COVID-19 crisis the Sheriff’s Office did not experience significant impacts, however in recent weeks the virus has impacted staffing levels as it hit both Sheriff Office deputies and our local dispatch staff,” said La Plata County Sheriff, Sean Smith. “We need to ensure that we have first responders available so that we can provide for the safety needs of our community so moving to level red is essential for the safety of our staff and the community,” Sheriff Smith said.

“It is just so critical that we slow the spread of COVID-19 so that we don’t overwhelm our hospitals,” said La Plata County Commissioner Gwen Lachelt, who also serves on the San Juan Basin Board of Public Health. “We are facing the very difficult decision of not socializing over Thanksgiving because we are now seeing the ramifications of having held Halloween gatherings. We need to be able to look back on this time and know that we did all we could to keep our community healthy. I know this is not easy for any of us, but it is so important to keeping each other and ourselves safe and healthy during this pandemic.”

“It is important that we, in partnership with San Juan Basin Public Health and our communities, increase our efforts to slow and stop the spread of the coronavirus, and support efforts to maintain a healthy community,” said Michael Murphy, interim CEO of Mercy Regional Medical Center. “In addition, we need to continue to focus on wearing masks when around others, maintaining safe social distancing, and properly washing our hands. These time-tested, very basic personal interventions are still the best defense against an epidemic until a safe and effective vaccine can be administered,” he said.

“This holiday season, the Durango Police department is thankful for San Juan Basin Public Health’s guidance for our community during this pandemic,” said Durango Police Chief Bob Brammer. “By asking our community to only leave home for essential business, we are increasing the safety of our Police Officers and other first responders and ensuring that our staff are available and healthy for all other emergency situations. We also need our businesses to do their part and ensure their customers comply with current mask restrictions, so our officers are not placed in precarious scenarios. We are here to help, please help us keep our entire community safe and healthy,” Chief Brammer said.

“We understand that moving to Protect Your Neighbor Level Red: SEVERE RISK may be burdensome during the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday; however, it is necessary for the health of our community,” said Durango Mayor Dean Brookie. “We need to take this pandemic seriously, especially coming into the colder winter months. By staying home and interacting with only those people from our immediate households, we will ensure our local healthcare system does not get overwhelmed and that our vibrant economy will be able to come back quickly and stronger than ever. The Durango City Council is proud of our community thus far and ask for everyone’s continued patience and fortitude,” Mayor Brookie said.

SJBPH will share additional details of the upcoming public health order from the state as the information becomes available.

San Juan Basin Public Health is a local public health agency, governed by a seven-member local Board of Health, serving all residents of La Plata and Archuleta counties. For over 70 years, San Juan Basin Public Health has improved the health and environment of the Southwest Colorado community.

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