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Sept. 15 Statement by Chair Deborah Kafoury on Phase 2 Reopening

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September 15, 2020

Sept. 15 Statement by Chair Deborah Kafoury on Phase 2 Reopening

We have not met all the requirements for applying for Phase 2, but more importantly, our metrics are unreliable now because of the wildfires. We won't know until the smoke has cleared what impact the smoke and fires will have on our COVID-19 cases.

I know that businesses are experiencing unprecedented hardship and financial pressure from the COVID-19 closures, now combined with hazardous air caused by the wildfires. Hundreds of local businesses have already closed, and many more are struggling to stay afloat. We have never confronted such a challenging time in our history.

The good news, to the extent that we have some, is that over the last several weeks, we have done well as a community to control the spread of COVID-19. But we are in a period of incredible uncertainty that is making us cautious about easing any restrictions.

People in Multnomah County have been doing the right things. And I want to thank everyone who has been wearing face coverings, keeping their social circles small and making so many sacrifices to get us to this point. Businesses have worked hard to create physical distancing, ensure mask use, and keep their employees and customers safe.

However, we have seen significant increases in viral spread following holiday weekends, and we expect to begin seeing that trend from Labor Day weekend gatherings beginning in the next week.

We also don't know yet what impact wildfires and smoke will have on viral spread. Tens of thousands of Oregonians have been evacuated, and many came to the Portland metro area. Households are taking in evacuees who are family and friends, and others are staying at evacuation shelters. Taking care of each other during this time is absolutely the right thing to do, but it may also increase the risk of spreading the virus.

Our health systems are currently experiencing additional pressure. Hospitals in Clackamas County had to send patients to other metro area hospitals because of their locations in or near evacuation zones. In addition, emergency department visits across Multnomah County regarding breathing and asthma-like symptoms doubled since last Thursday.

COVID-19 testing has also been interrupted by wildfire smoke, with area testing clinics, which take place outside, cancelled. So, it is going to take a bit longer to get the full picture of where we are.

These are incredibly challenging times. We will continue working closely with our partners in Washington and Clackamas counties to monitor the data and respond as a region.



[Reopening Multnomah County amid COVID-19](#)

A public health framework for restarting public life and business and living with a pandemic

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