

Here's the order Murphy says NJ businesses will reopen (updated)

By: *Daniel J. Munoz*

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Gov. Phil Murphy on Monday unveiled the guidelines his administration will follow regarding New Jersey's restrictions and mandated closures and the order in which they **will be lifted**, as the state moves further from its mid-April peak of COVID-19.

The next restrictions that could be reversed will give the state some degree of expanded in-person retail, while **sit-down dining will mainly be allowed outdoors**, with possibly a "significantly reduced" indoor dining capacity.

Museums and libraries would be able to reopen, as would personal care businesses – such as salons, tattoo shops and massage parlors – on some kind of limited basis.

But, that's all in the second stage, Murphy said, and New Jersey is still in the "midst" of the first stage.

Stage "zero" was the most intense set of restrictions, under which the state and its residents operated for much of March and April, while the third stage has even looser guidelines.



Gov. Phil Murphy speaks during his May 9, 2020, press conference at War Memorial in Trenton on the State's response to COVID-19. – THOMAS COSTELLO, GANNETT

The governor assured that this timeline will span a "matter of weeks," and that "by the time we're in mid-June, we're in a meaningfully different place."

Following that is a new normal – which Murphy cautioned is a ways off, until until the state adopts the "widespread use of vaccine or life-saving treatment."

To date, restrictions that have been rolled back allow for outdoor activities, such as visiting beaches; curbside pick-up for retail; take-out and delivery dining; and enjoying state and county parks, golf courses and boating rentals.

Under the second stage, child care could be expanded with some restrictions on capacity; K-12 schools and universities could offer limited forms of in-person learning; and summer camps and summer schools could offer smaller-scale in-person activities.

During this stage, people will be encouraged to stay home "for the majority" of time. Small-scale gatherings with friends and family would be safe to resume at this level. Public transit would be discouraged for the majority of residents.

"Our singular goal will be to prevent another attack by COVID-19. We will be guided by public health, data and science," Murphy said on Monday at his daily COVID-19 press briefing in Trenton.

"Even within each stage we will phase in our restart," Murphy said. "Then we will step back as we look at these steps and make sure the data works. We will move through each step, we will do so with public health firmly in mind."

Stage three will include even more sit-down dining, limited entertainment and gatherings, bars with limited capacity, and certain degrees of in-office work.

"The hardest nut to crack will be indoors, no ventilation, sedentary realities," Murphy said.

In the third stage, most people would have access to child care, while K-12 and college classrooms would operate in person with reduced capacity. Public transit would not be discouraged for the public, but even still riders should wear face coverings and maintain social distancing.



Michael Maron, president and CEO, Holy Name Medical Center. – AARON HILL

Then finally, the state could resume the "new normal" for our workplaces, downtowns and main streets."

Michael Maron, president of Holy Name Medical Center in Teaneck, cautioned against any expectation of things quickly going back toward "the way things used to be."

"I don't see that being a realistic approach," he told lawmakers at a special remotely-held "Senate Fiscal Recovery Strategies" committee meeting earlier Monday.

"We have to define and embrace the new normal and that new normal is going to be with us for years to come," added Maron, who himself was stricken by the virus in March, and heads a hospital largely considered **ground zero for the virus** when it first hit North Jersey that month.

In order to move from one phase to the next, the state needs to see “sustained improvements in **public health indicators**,” such as a two-week drop in new cases and hospitalizations. The state would need to have a considerable increase in the availability of testing and the ability to track down and isolate potential new cases.

State health care infrastructure will need to be in place to handle widely expected future waves of cases. And workplaces, schools, child care centers and public transit will need to have safeguards in place to keep down the risk of exposure to the virus.

During all of this, Murphy said, the public would need to practice social distancing, wear face coverings, stay away from any type of gatherings, and disinfect workplaces and businesses.

Murphy warned that 75 percent of the state’s workforce has some degree of in-person contact with the public, putting them at constant risk of exposure. Thirty-five percent of workers have low degrees of contact, such as construction and factory workers, and their employees need to adopt “safeguarding practices,” such as masks and frequent sanitation.

For the 40 percent of high-contact workers, such as bartenders and restaurant workers, those businesses would have to restrict capacity, reduce capacity and re-train employees in new health-conscious policies as they come back online.

The remaining 25 percent of the workforce, mainly office workers, can simply work from home.

Editor’s note: This story was updated at 4:49 p.m. EST on May 18, 2020 to include additional information regarding the stages of new Jersey reopening and comments from Gov. Phil Murphy and Holy Name Medical Center President and CEO Michael Maron.



Throughout all phases of the state’s reopening, the governor says the public will need to practice social distancing. – PIXABAY



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