



County of Watauga

Administration Building, Suite 205 • 814 West King Street • Boone, North Carolina 28607

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

John Welch, Chairman
Billy Kennedy, Vice-Chairman
Larry Turnbow
Charlie Wallin
Perry Yates

Telephone 828-265-8000

TDD 1-800-735-2962

Voice 1-800-735-8262

COUNTY MANAGER

Deron T. Geouque

COUNTY ATTORNEY

Anthony di Santi

Staying Ahead of the Curve in Watauga County A Phased-In Plan for Relaxing Restrictions and Protecting Public Health

Watauga County will utilize the guidance established by the Federal Government and the Governor's three (3) phase opening plan. The Governor's North Carolina Stay At Home order was extended through May 8, 2020. The orders extending closure of restaurants for dine-in service and bars and closure of other close-contact businesses were also extended following the Governor's phased plan timeline.

Currently, including the restrictions outlined in the existing Executive Orders issued by Governor Cooper, these Watauga County's restrictions remain in effect:

1. Prohibition on short-term rentals; and
2. All residents and non-residents of Watauga County arriving for overnight stays are ordered, while present in the County, to self-quarantine for a period of 14 days or until 7 days after symptoms have resolved, whichever is longer, if arrival was preceded by overnights outside the County.

The North Carolina Stay At Home and other orders were extended due to North Carolina not meeting the leveling or downward trajectory of the key metrics needed to begin the gradual lifting of restrictions.

The County will rely on the following guidelines to make decisions moving forward:

Initial Period

Data must show that key metrics are being met for the restrictions to be lifted and the three-phase plan to start. Testing, tracing, and trends will measure the key metrics in lifting or implementing restrictions. The key metrics are:

- COVID-like syndromic cases over 14 days
- Lab-confirmed cases over 14 days
- Positive tests as a percentage of total tests over 14 days
- Hospitalizations over 14 days

The above listed metrics must show a leveling or downward trajectory to move to Phase I which is anticipated to be accomplished by May 8, 2020. In the event the Governor delays the May 8, 2020 date, the County will follow the Governor's recommendation and keep County restrictions in place.

Phase I

Phase I will allow for an increase of services and infrastructure needed before relaxing restrictions for the sectors of our local economy.

The following measures will be taken during this period:

- Modify the Stay At Home order to allow travel not currently defined as essential by allowing people to leave home for commercial activity at any business that is allowed to be open, such as clothing stores, sporting goods stores, book shops, houseware stores and other retailers.
- Ensure that any open stores implement appropriate employee and consumer social distancing, enhanced hygiene and cleaning protocols, symptom screening of employees, accommodations for vulnerable workers, and provide education to employees and workers to combat misinformation.
- Promote telework for nonessential employees statewide.
- Continue to limit gatherings to no more than 10 people.
- Open parks that have been closed subject to the same gathering limitation. Outdoor exercise will continue to be encouraged.
- Continue to recommend face coverings in public spaces when 6 feet of distancing isn't possible.
- Encourage employers to continue teleworking policies.
- Continue rigorous restrictions on nursing homes and other congregant care settings.
- Keep Local emergency orders with more restrictive measures in place, if warranted.

Phase 2

Phase II will commence at least 2-3 weeks after Phase I, with key metrics being met. The following measures will be taken during this time.

- Lift Stay At Home order with strong encouragement for vulnerable populations to continue staying at home to stay safe.
- After two (2) weeks from the implementation of Phase II and key metrics continuing to be met, partially lift County short-term rentals with a fifty percent (50%) reduction in listed maximum occupancy capacity as rated and published. Family members residing in the same residence are exempt from the fifty percent (50%) reduction in maximum capacity limit.
- Campground openings and restrictions can be consistent with those published by the National Park Services. Otherwise, campgrounds shall be subject to the same openings and restrictions as short-term rentals during the applicable period.
- Lift County 14 day self-quarantine in conjunction with the lifting of short-term rental restriction.
- Allow limited opening of restaurants, bars, fitness centers, personal care services, and other businesses that can follow safety protocols including the potential need to reduce capacity.
- Open all County buildings June 1, 2020 with the exception of the Lois E. Harrill Senior Center and the Western Watauga Community Center.
- Allow gathering at places such as houses of worship and entertainment venues at reduced capacity.

- Increase in number of people allowed at gatherings.
- Resume all board and commission meetings with reduced capacity allowed for attendees.
- Open public playgrounds.
- Continue rigorous restrictions on nursing homes and other congregant care settings.

* The purpose for postponing the lifting of short-term rentals in the initial period of Phase II is to ensure restaurants have adequate staffing levels and supplies for the increase in service. Further, delaying the lifting of short-term rentals allows AppHealthCare staff sufficient time between each phase and adjustment to carefully monitor for resurgence of transmission.

Phase 3

Phase III will commence at least 4-6 weeks after Phase II with key metrics being met. The following measures will be taken during this period.

- Lessen restrictions for vulnerable populations with encouragement to continue practicing physical distancing and minimizing exposure to settings where distancing isn't possible.
- Allow increased capacity at restaurants, bars, other businesses, houses of worships, and entertainment venues.
- Lift all County short-term rental restrictions.
- Further increase the number of people allowed at gatherings.
- Resume all board and commission meetings as previous held.
- Continue rigorous restrictions on nursing homes and other congregant care settings.

The County recognizes the need for testing, tracing and trends to move in a leveling or downward trajectory for each of these phases to move forward. In the event there is a spike, the County will follow recommendations from the Governor's team, AppHealthCare and all of our partners to determine if additional temporary County restrictions are necessary.

*** Note – In light of the Governor's Press conference on Tuesday May 5, 2020 and revisions made to Phase I of the Governor's Reopening Plan; Watauga County is reviewing and monitoring these revisions along with modifications to the restrictions of surrounding counties. Watauga County will continue to monitor trends emerging during Phase I of easing restrictions and discuss any implications on the County's current plan at the May 19, 2020, Board Meeting. These efforts are intended to help protect all of our citizens, including those most vulnerable for severe illness. Watauga County will continue partnering with our local municipalities to make adjustments to the existing plan if needed and supported by public health data.**