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Ohio's reopening plan: Here's when we can start going back to work

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Come May 4, Central Ohio's office workers will be allowed to return to work whether their industry is essential or nonessential, although Gov. [Mike DeWine](#) is still recommending people work from home if possible.

Additionally, even once businesses reopen, they will be required to implement a series of protective measures designed to stem the potential spread of coronavirus, including mandated mask-wearing, social distancing and operating at limited capacity.

Guiding principals for general office environments: pic.twitter.com/ewRKWdu342

— Governor Mike DeWine (@GovMikeDeWine) April 27, 2020

Also on Monday, manufacturing, distribution and construction businesses will be able to ramp back up if they had shut down because of pandemic-related restrictions.

Consumer retail and service businesses that weren't already deemed essential won't be able to reopen until May 12. Customers would have to wear face coverings.

These are the basic principals for consumer, retail, and other services. We do want employees to wear masks. Every retail outlet will have to be able to follow these protocols. pic.twitter.com/8T2WK4kfaQ

— Governor Mike DeWine (@GovMikeDeWine) April 27, 2020

"My heart aches for the businessmen and -women who are not able to work, who are looking at savings going down every day," DeWine said. "We've got to get people back to work. At the same time we've got to protect Ohioans."

DeWine said he is deferring the decision on the date when hair salons, restaurants and other hospitality and entertainment-related businesses will be able to reopen. The state will need to learn from data on the first phase.

Gatherings of 10 or more people and most other elements of the stay-home order remain.

"As we find out more about (the virus), we find out it is more prevalent than we thought," DeWine said. "That to me indicates it also is more dangerous, because people can be infecting other people and they don't know it."

The dates are part of DeWine's eagerly awaited reopening plan, unveiled Monday. DeWine had previously said he hoped to begin the gradual process of reopening the state's economy on May 1.

The only change that will happen on Friday itself, however, is a loosening of restrictions on healthcare procedures.

Patients will be allowed to receive care that does not require an overnight stay, and was not previously allowed under the state's order that restricted nonessential procedures. Dentists and veterinary practices also will be allowed to resume non-emergency care.

Each business will have to make its own decision on when to reopen, but must follow the layered safety protocols including face covering, distant or divided workstations, hand-washing and daily symptom checks.

Many of the procedures were learned from businesses that have safely continued throughout the shutdown, DeWine said.



CARRIE GHOSE FOR ACBJ

In this file photo, Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted looks on as Gov. Mike DeWine leads a daily press conference on measures that state officials are taking to limit the spread of the coronavirus. Officials have not announced their plan to reopen the state.

"The grocery stores have really developed a way of doing things," he said. "The one-way aisle, that's not something I would have thought of."

Meanwhile, one-third of state representatives have endorsed a Republican Party-led proposal to open all businesses on Friday. The [four-page plan](#) says that could be done while also observing social distancing but does not specify how.

The Ohio Department of Health has warned to expect an increase in infections and hospitalizations with each increase in movement and contact among people. The goal is to modulate that increase to prevent overwhelming hospitals as has happened in other states and countries.

"The worst thing that could happen is if we reopen and see a very, very big spike in the number of infections and we'd have to reclose the state for a period of time," said [Grzegorz Rempala](#), professor of mathematics and biostatistics in Ohio State University's College of Public Health.

Rempala is one of the leaders of OSU's group advising the state on projections of the disease's spread based. [Its models are based on a person's social networks](#), and have been [adjusted](#) over time with more data. Basically, each infected person spread the virus to fewer people than first projected, so Ohio avoided exponential growth.

"We have done some simulations on different types of openings for different kinds of industries," Rempala said in an interview. "When you open everything at once and use no protective gear, that was certainly creating a very large spike."

But the more gradual reopenings are projected to cause increases of several hundred daily cases, he said. Typically about 20% require hospitalization, although Covid-19 stays average 20 days instead of the typical three-day hospitalization.

[More robust testing to roll out over the coming weeks](#), with a goal of 22,000 daily by the end of May, will create an even greater understanding of the true prevalence.

By staying home, Ohioans have created a smaller surge than the earliest projections, DeWine said. The path back depends on continued prudence.

"The coronavirus is still here. It's just as dangerous as it's ever been," DeWine said. "It is searching. It's searching for bodies."

"Many of the things you have done, you've dramatically slowed this process, but it's still there."