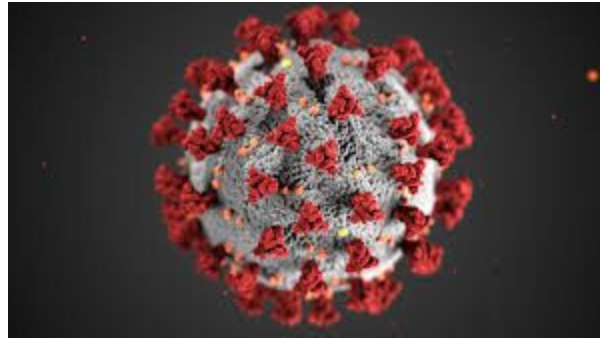


Del Norte's COVID status with state as on 'thin ice'

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The county health officer is worried Del Norte County's status is precarious in the state's new reopening guidelines.

Dr. Warren Rehwaldt told the Board of Supervisors Tuesday that Del Norte is about where he expected it to be with the amount of positive COVID-19 cases at this point in the summer. However, it's spot in Tier 3 in the state's new Blueprint for a Safer Economy, just updated on Monday, is not secure.

"We are skating on the edge a little bit, kind of by how the data is going to be used by the state," Rehwaldt said.

According to the state's new website <https://covid19.ca.gov/safer-economy/>, Del Norte has 10.4 new COVID-19 positive cases per day per 100,000 people and a .9% positivity rate. This places the county in the moderate, or Tier 3 category.

Rehwaldt said there was a method in place to give counties credit for doing a lot of testing to offset their case counts and stay in a better tier.

However, there is a built in small penalty if counties don't have good testing which would amplify case counts.

"I am told this morning that that's not going to apply to counties under 100,000 people," Rehwaldt said. "I'm still trying to get some clarity from the state acting health officer on that point."

He added that while Del Norte County is in Tier 3, most of the rest of the state is in Tier 1, or widespread category, which in the old system puts them on the watch list.

“People should be mindful if we exceed on the confirmed infection on a daily basis we risk running into the next lower category, forcing things that are now open at higher capacity to have to close down to certain levels,” Rehwaldt said.

He encouraged people to go to the state’s website for more detailed look at the breakdown of what can and cannot be open at each tier level.

Rehwaldt said he is still hoping for to get clarification from the state on adult recreation activity and updated guidance on gathering sizes in general.

Supervisor Chris Howard wanted to know why high school students in Humboldt and Fortuna were able to attend class in person while Del Norte students were not.

Rehwaldt said there was not a particular reason from the Del Norte County Health Department.

“I was just trying to be supportive and offer as much technical support as I could to the school staff and superintendent as they went forward with planning,” Rehwaldt explained. “It’s a judgement call where you think your most likely increase of what your case activity is going to be and what your capacity to compensate for it or to deal with it.

“It’s misleading to compare us to Humboldt because they have an in-county health lab, which we do not,” he added.

Rehwaldt said the decision to start with in person attendance or distance learning was largely left up to the school districts to decide.

“I was happy to support Superintendent (Jeff) Harris with his decision to start with distance learning, phasing people in and measuring the effect as we went. I think it made a lot of sense,” Rehwaldt said.

Supervisor Roger Gitlin wanted to know if there were plans to reduce the demands on restaurants and allowing them to open fully, not just the 50 percent capacity currently allowed. He also pointed toward Brookings which has much more relaxed restrictions on dining in.

Rehwaldt said essentially the tier system is a decision made at the state level way above his pay level.

“But I’d be happy to support anything that is reasonable and based on best data. I agree, it’s been a hardship for a lot of businesses, especially based on a lot of contact having people moving in and out their doors everyday,” Rehwaldt said. “I can’t equate us Curry County exactly, but I understand the problem. It’s kind of unique to Del Norte, because we’re both high demand summer tourist areas in the summer being on the coast and we’re in neighboring states with a different set of rules.”