

State grants county variance to open number of businesses early

May 17, 2020



Matt Wakefield got the news Friday he and the other co-owners of SeaQuake Brewery have been waiting six weeks to hear – the state gave the green light to restaurants and other businesses in the county to open early.

Del Norte County Health Officer Dr. Warren Rehwaldt submitted a local variance and attestation plan to the California Department of Public Health Thursday and heard right back Friday the request was granted. The state outlined which businesses could reopen from the shutdown due to the COVID-19 emergency. Due to the Del Norte County's isolation from the state and low numbers of confirmed cases, the state allowed the following businesses to open early as long as they had COVID-19 Operations Plans in place to meet mitigation measures:

- Clothing stores
- Thrift stores
- Furniture Stores
- Auto dealership
- Childcare

- Golf courses
- Public parks, non-congregate portions and trails
- Office-based businesses, though telework is still encouraged whenever possible
- Limited services of landscape gardening, pet grooming, and tanning facilities
- Dine-In restaurants

“We’re excited and ready to open,” Wakefield told The Triplicate Friday. “We’re getting all our tables adequately spaced, disinfected. But we’re going to wait until Tuesday. What we are following, technically we could open now, but we’re getting everything squared away over the weekend since we’re closed Sunday and Monday anyway.”

Before businesses can reopen, they must submit a coronavirus mitigation plan that gets approved by the county health office. Wakefield said as a member of The California Restaurant Association, the organization provided a template plan that has already been approved by the county. He said staff have been trained on sanitation procedures, have a supply of gloves and masks and know all the additional rules for the limited dine-in services. To accommodate the 50% limit on diners, Wakefield spaced tables six feet apart, eliminated bar seating and the large community dining tables. Their outdoor patio seating also remains open.

Wakefield said customers also need to know what to expect as well.

“We’re asking customers to wear masks when they come into the building. Once they’re seated, they would be taking off to eat and drink,” Wakefield said. “While they’re not necessarily required to wear masks to step in, unless the state gives us further guidance, we’ll adhere to current social distancing rules.”

According to the state reopening guidelines, other businesses that can open include laundromats, dry cleaners, auto repair shops, car washes, landscapers, pet grooming, dog walking. In addition, residential services that can open early include residential and janitorial cleaning services, appliance repair persons, handymen, electricians and plumbers.

With so many being authorized to return to work, others are ramping up their services to watch the kids, including the Del Norte Child Care Council.

Melody Mitchell, DNCCC executive director, told The Triplicate their office plans to reopen June 1.

“We submitted our plan a couple weeks ago. We were going to open May 15, but we wanted to make sure we got our social distancing plans in place before we reopened,” Mitchell said.

She added their family childcare services never closed, just the in-office programs.

“Parents going back is great and they’re going to be in search of childcare. We’re going to do our best to accommodate all those needs,” Mitchell said.

To meet the spike in demand Mitchell said the Child Care Council is adding five new family childcare homes that that recently got their licenses.

The state outlined guidance for each industry to reopen and can be read online at <https://covid19.ca.gov/industry-guidance>.

Wakefield said the take-out only dining was actually successful enough he's looking at continuing and expanding the model, such as adding family meal kits, take and bake pizza and any other idea that helps people get something that works for their schedule.

"I hope a crazy amount shows up. I'm not really sure what to expect," Wakefield said. "We're staffing up in the hopes we'll be busy. But we'll take it day by day."