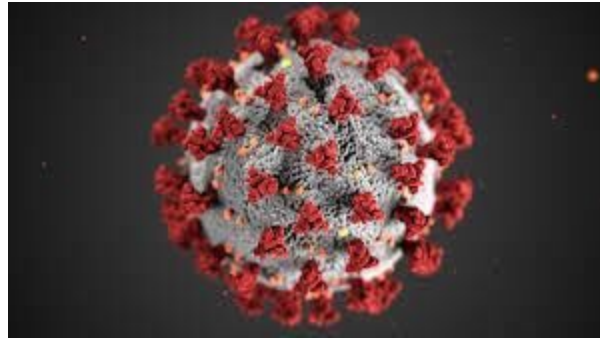


Public health officer updates county supervisors on state shut-down order

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Del Norte County's health officer has been making the rounds, explaining California Governor Gavin Newsom's Monday order to shut down certain businesses in response to the rising numbers of coronavirus cases in the state.

Dr. Warren Rehwaldt said the new closures of businesses that had just been allowed to reopen was a hard pill to swallow.

On Monday, the governor ordered dine-in restaurants, to close, along with bars, brewpubs, breweries and pubs (both indoor and outdoor). The new closure list included wineries and tasting rooms, movie theaters, family entertainment centers such as bowling alleys, miniature golf, batting cages and arcades, zoos and museums and cardrooms. In some areas of California, the list is even longer.

"For right now, we are still doing very well in this county," Rehwaldt wrote in a letter after learning of the new order. "Our data suggests that we are doing better than the models project, at least for the moment. We still are able to do some good case investigation and contact tracing, and our reported cases numbers remain low. Most of the surrounding counties are in a similar situation, but things have definitely changed for much of the rest of the state."

On Tuesday, Rehwaldt gave a report to the county Board of Supervisors.

District 5 Supervisor Bob Berkowitz asked how much leeway Rehwaldt has to deviate from the governor's newest round of closure orders.

"Are they suggestions or are they mandatory?" Berkowitz asked.

“I don’t consider them suggestions,” Rehwaldt answered. “Whenever the governor comes out with an order that is linked with a CDPH (California Department of Public Health) statement, we consider that a joint order. I would prefer clearer language. I do not think the announcement had very clear language. But we do not have any leeway to not enforce it. All we can do is if we think the need is within our community, we can make it stricter.”

Rehwaldt told supervisors the biggest issue that’s going to affect Del Norte County is the demand for testing.

“Not the demand for testing sites, like the mobile site at the high school. The problem is with processing nationwide. Because there’s so much activity in Texas, Arizona, Florida and other parts of the south, the demand has outpaced the supply,” he said.

He mentioned California has a lot of labs that can do the testing and is diverting some testing to these labs to pick up for the extra volume. He explained the high demand has caused a lag in results turnaround.

“We had a group of tests last week that were 12 days old. But the last batch of tests, I was told, were three days old, so that’s good news,” Rehwaldt said. “Because if you can’t get results back in a timely manner, the chance to impact those cases is lost.”

He then addressed the latest Biobot data, which is derived from measuring RNA samples in the county’s wastewater.

“The data from the end of June showed a big surge in activity,” he said. “We’re still not sure how to interpret Biobot data. It’s still relatively new technology. I’m really interested to see what the latest tests show that was collected over this last weekend.”

He added the if it does have some predictive value, it helps the health department gear up for potential outbreaks. The problem, Rehwaldt explained, is that people may produce a lot of viral material a long time after they are infectious. He believe this can confound reports from time to time.

District 3 Supervisor Chris Howard asked Rehwaldt if he had specific numbers of potential people in the community infected by the coronavirus using the Biobot data, as the wastewater treatment plant serves 60% of Del Norte County.

“We’ve had a couple reports at zero. But if you’re asking for infected, based on data on this test, and clinical data, I would extrapolate between 200 to 600 that have been exposed and recovered. That’s an armchair estimate, it might be accurate, it might not,” Rehwaldt said.

District 1 Supervisor Roger Gitlin got clarification that the latest closures extended to only indoor dining and that music is still not permitted at restaurants. Rehwaldt said he has sought clarification from the state at least four times in the last month on musicians and it seems to never change.

“It feels like it is low priority item for them on their list of things to do,” he said. “Personally, I think there needs to be a distinction between a solo musician or a small group or duo compared to a full-size orchestra or professional choir.” More information on the state closure order is [here](#).

